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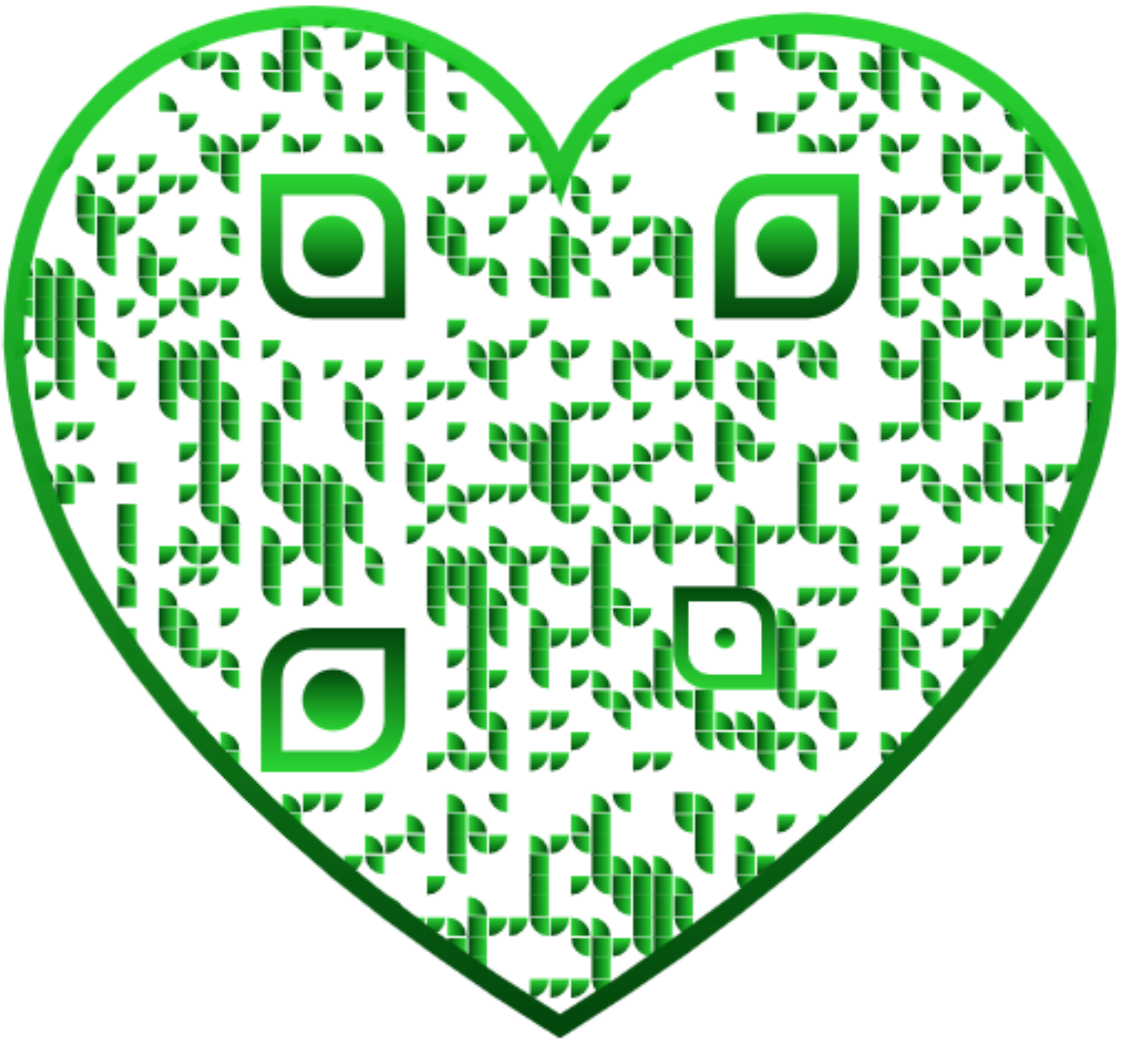

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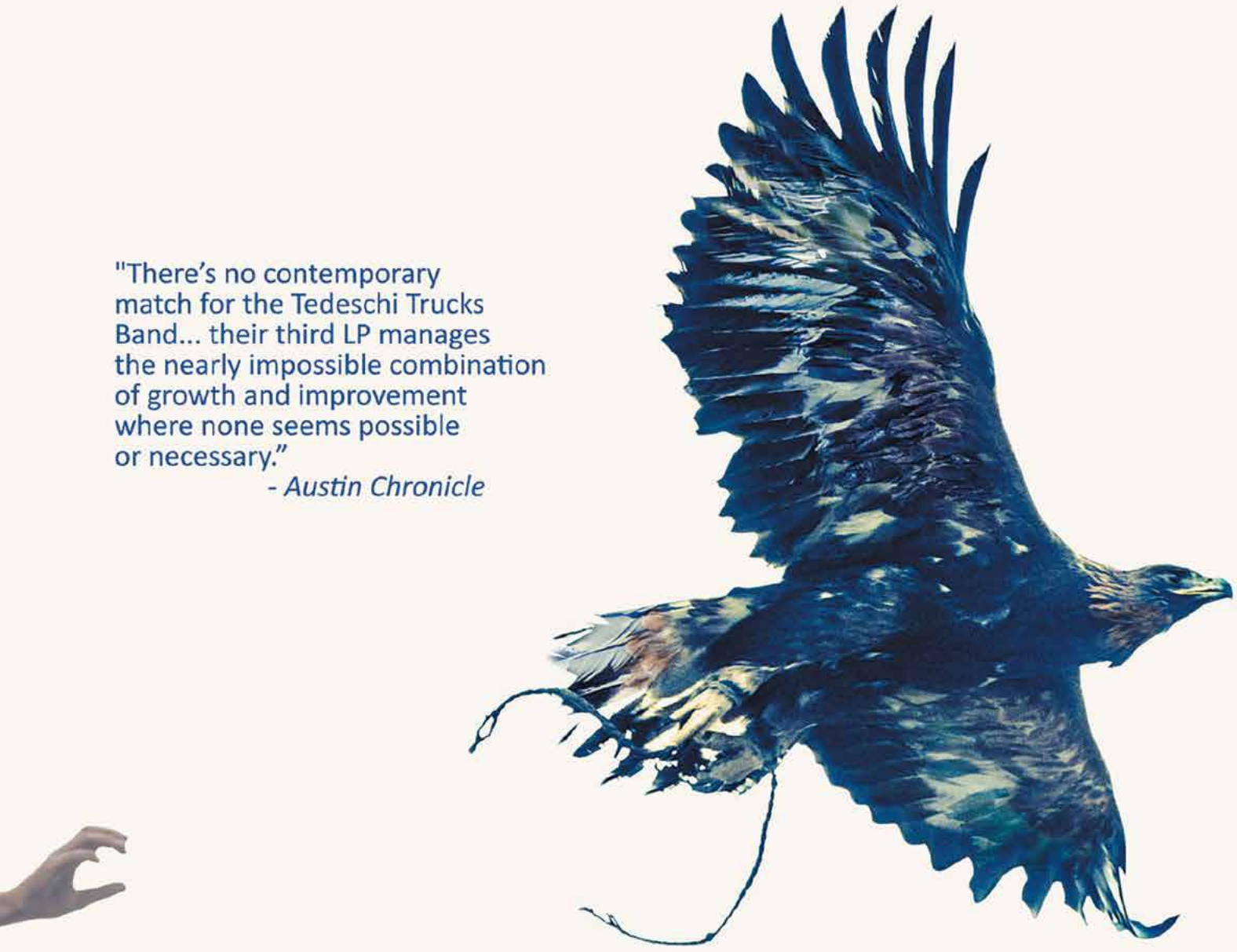

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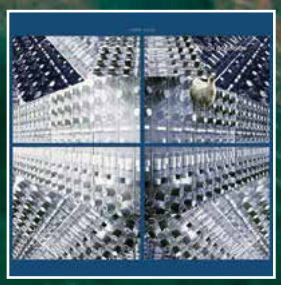

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Editor's Note

MARCH 2016

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V43 NO2

THIS COULD BE THE YEAR of the *Relix* book group.

It's something I've been thinking about for some time. We'd select a title, give everyone a month or two to read it, and then assemble at some fine venue or festival to discuss. I imagine we could pull in the author to join the dialogue.

My suggestion for our first book? *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America*, written by *Relix* Contributing Editor Jesse Jarnow, who also penned this issue's Animal Collective cover story.

Here's the official description from the dust jacket: "The story of psychedelics and the Grateful Dead is a secret American through-line between the 1950s and the present, an always-radical and ever-changing counterculture that continues to have a transformative impact on life in America. Uncovering the hidden history of the biggest psychedelic distribution system the world has ever known, *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America* animates an alternative America with the narratives of utopian homesteaders and self-taught black market chemists, spiritual seekers and pranksters, graffiti artists and government-wanted hackers, entrepreneurs and pioneering DJs, and much more."

Mr. Jarnow adds: "There were a lot of questions I wanted to know the answer to, really, and stories I wanted to know. The book is an attempt to write the narrative of psychedelic America long beyond the '60s, a secret history that extends continuously to the present, with the '60s done after the first chapter and the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads acting as the central through-line—just as they became the center of the LSD black market for nearly three decades—but connecting lots of other dots, too. I wanted to show the impact of underground psychedelics on American culture and uncover the long arc story behind it using narrative nonfiction that focuses on a range of characters including, early Stanford computer scientists, tapers, graffiti artists, radical hackers, commune dwellers, musicians, chemists, dealers, food co-ops and entrepreneurs. There's a chapter built around Wetlands. There's a chapter built around Vermont in the '80s and Phish's place in it. There's a bit of *Relix* history, too, and a chapter titled 'Festival Season.' Lots of Deadheads in cyberspace. Lots of drugs. Fun for the whole #fam."

A "heady" read

Sure sounds like it. Here are some other suggestions for your bedside table... How about *Jerry on Jerry: The Unpublished Jerry Garcia Interviews*, which we excerpted last issue? Of course, March, historically, was the month for the Allman Brothers Band's Beacon Theatre run, so why not pick up the expanded edition of Alan Paul's *One Way Out: The Inside History of the Allman Brothers Band*? For a more recent publication by a steady *Relix* contributor, how about Alan Light's *What Happened, Miss Simone?: A Biography*. Other upcoming titles that intrigue me include: Barney Hoskyns' *Small Town Talk: Bob Dylan, The Band, Van Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Friends in the Wild Years of Woodstock*; Bob Mehr's *Trouble Boys: The True Story of the Replacements, the Last Rock 'n' Roll Band*; and Dave Stewart's *Sweet Dreams Are Made of This: A Life in Music*. This may even be the year we see one, or both, of the announced Lou Reed biographies from Anthony DeCurtis and Will Hermes.

You see, I've even made it this far without mentioning *Might As Well,* my own novel set at a Grateful Dead show in the spring of 1990—an excerpt appears on pages 40–43—or John Popper's autobiography, *Suck and Blow: And Other Stories I'm Not Supposed to Tell*, which I co-authored. (With any luck, we'll run an excerpt in the next issue.)

Bringing this all the way back around to our current cover story, as Jesse explains, "Animal Collective are a link in a chain, and represent an important moment in recent cultural history, when the Grateful Dead came back into the canon of underground cool. And—with bands like Animal Collective on the vanguard—that psychedelic moment continues into the present, as psychedelic research begins to come back into the mainstream and the view of psychedelics themselves seems to have become, if not quite more *accepted* than ever, at least, more nuanced than ever."

Animal Collective's Geologist has read *Heads* and opines, "This book reads like an actual acid trip. The web of stories and characters grows almost too fast to fully understand and appreciate, yet whenever the breadth of the threads starts to feel overwhelming, *Heads* centers you with the Grateful Dead as the connective tissue and you willingly go along for the ride."

Seriously, a *Relix* book group. *Shall we go, you and I?* Stay tuned...

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ON THE COVER

Brian DeGraw
shot Animal Collective.

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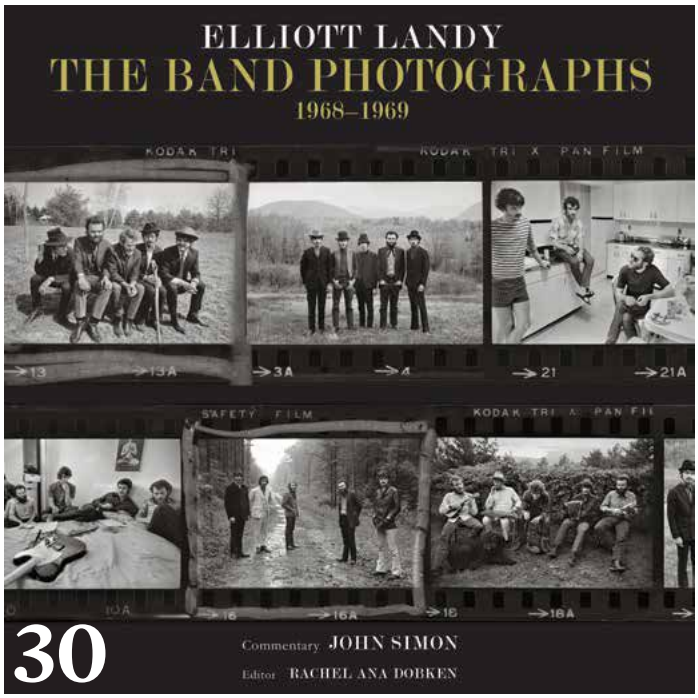

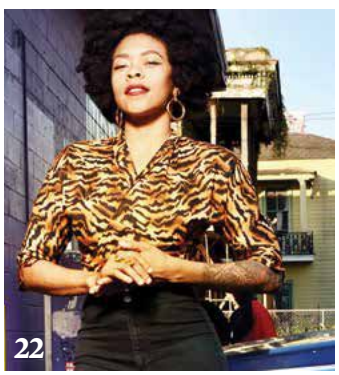

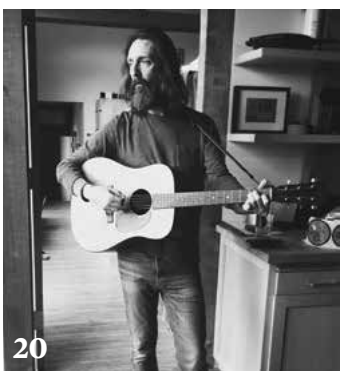

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FEATURES

50 Love to Say Dada

If there is one constant in **Animal Collective**'s evolution from Baltimore Deadheads to museum-curating art-rockers, then it's that they've stayed true to their weird. Despite never doing things the normal—or easy—way and arguably moving further from commercial convention with every left turn, these days, Animal Collective are bigger than ever. More impressive, as Associate Editor **Jesse Jarnow** observes, is that they have also nurtured "one of those fanbases that dresses up for shows and smokes a lot of pot and trades live recordings and requires record company publicity departments to send out strictly watermarked file streams." Yet, at their core, these three—or sometimes four—friends have stuck together throughout their decade-and-a-half rise from the turn-of-the-century psychedelic-experimental corner of New York's music grotto to the global stage.

46 Redemption Song

The members of **Perpetual Groove** have battled addiction, passing fads and at least a few seemingly permanent breakups during their rocky rise from Savannah, Ga., dorms to sold-out international shows. In spite of their struggles, the Southeast-bred quartet have never given up and recently returned to the road with renewed vigor after a particularly dark two-year break. They've also made peace with the group's frontman and emotive center, **Brock Butler**, who is now happier and healthier than he's been in years, following his arrest and time in drug court. **Brian Bavosa** explains why Georgia's once-and-future jamband hope still believes in second chances.

44 Headphones & Earworms

They may have dropped the funny name and spread themselves out across the country, but **Josh Epstein** and **Daniel Zott** are still able to capture the hook-heavy, infectious energy that inspired their after-party-friendly debut, *It's a Corporate World*. And after years of being pegged as the next big thing by record execs and critics alike, the duo now known as **JR JR** are finally poised to reach that happy middle ground between headphone-approved art-rock and radio-ready earworms. **Jeff Miller** spent time with the pair shortly after the release of their self-titled third album as they discussed their creative yin-and-yang, and he co-wrote a new original song in the process.

40 Book Excerpt: *Might As Well*

On Oct. 14, 1989, a Grateful Dead fan named Adam Katz mysteriously died outside a show at the Brendan Byrne Arena (later known as the Izod Center) in East Rutherford, N.J. This incident provides the jumping-off point for the debut novel by *Relix* Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick**, who looks back at this moment in time through the lenses of seven characters, a few of whom appear in this excerpt from *Might As Well*.

38 Happy When It Rains

M. Ward doesn't mind inclement weather. In fact, the acclaimed Portland, Ore.-based indie-folk artist has made a career using his three-season climate as the basis for his often emotionally charged and always thoughtful songs. Though Ward originally had his eyes set on a DIY doo-wop record, *More Rain*, his first solo release since 2012, blossomed into his true Pacific Northwest statement. Assistant Editor **Matt Inman** sat down with Ward during a recent New York trip and walked through his newest collection of personal reflections and celebrity cameos.

36 Bob Mould's Third Wave

As Hüsker Dü's frontman, **Bob Mould** ignited a punk revolution that set the likes of Ryan Adams, Craig Finn, Dave Grohl and Britt Daniel into action. But Mould's post-Hüsker résumé has been decidedly harder to pin down, moving from his underrated group Sugar to DJ work, electronica experiments and, of course, heavy, hooky rock. More recently, he's embraced his elder-statesman role and is now deep into his third-essential wave as a fiery singer-songwriter. **Ryan Reed** catches up with the alt-rock icon as he prepares to release his 12th solo LP, *Patch the Sky*.

Allison Bridges Robinson (The Chris Robinson Brotherhood)

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ZIGGY STARDUST GETS CALLED HOME

On January 10, the legendary David Bowie passed away after an 18-month battle with cancer. Blurring the lines between performance art and reality until the end, Bowie released a formal goodbye to fans—his final album, Blackstar*—just days before his passing. As expected, tributes poured in from all corners of the entertainment industry.*

I was privileged to sit 10th row at the Boston Garden in '02 or '03 to see Bowie. What a concert. Of all the artists I've seen live, Bowie was definitely a performer who seemed to enjoy it more than most. He brought a lot of joy to what he did. Great artist. RIP.

Brian via Jambands.com

A brilliant artist and cultural icon—his work has meant so much to so many of us, for so long. I grew up listening to Bowie. His music is timeless. How fitting that he leaves us with a final testament to his genius with *Blackstar*. RIP.

Timmy via Jambands.com

I have seen most of the "great ones" live, in concert. If I am objective, then he may be at the very top. When God was giving out talent—he got in line twice.

Pat via Jambands.com

Sad news, for sure! A musical chameleon. We never knew what to expect, but it was almost always interesting. He was a true original and will be missed. Thanks for the great music, David!!!

Deadman via Jambands.com

THE MIGHTY, MIGHTY LEMMY

On December 28, just four days after he celebrated his 70th birthday, Motörhead's

David Bowie

Lemmy Kilmister passed away after a battle with prostate cancer. Artists ranging from Dave Grohl to Umphrey's McGee paid their onstage respects to the metal icon, who was also the subject of a 2010 film directed by longtime Relix *contributor Wes Orshoski.*

Nicest person in the music industry. True musical genius! Thanks for keeping it real. RIP, Lemmy.

Bigdaddybflo via Jambands.com

I stood next to Motörhead's stacks at the Penny Arcade in Rochester, N.Y., back in '87 for their tour behind *Orgasmatron*. My ears are still recovering. Gonna miss him. RIP, Lemmy, but I'm sure Philthy Phil is waiting at his kit for you to plug in!

Me via Jambands.com

PEACEFUL EASY FEELING

Glenn Frey—who co-founded the Eagles in 1971 and helped take the country-rock superstars to incredible heights as the lead singer on hits like "Take It Easy," "Peaceful Easy Feeling" and "Tequila Sunrise"—succumbed to complications from rheumatoid arthritis, acute ulcerative colitis and pneumonia. He

Lemmy

was 67. Frey wrapped up the History of the Eagles tour, which featured a reunion with original guitarist Bernie Leadon, just months before his passing.

RIP, Glenn. I'd always go see the Eagles with my mom, who is facing her own health problems right now. Good memories—the years go by too fast.

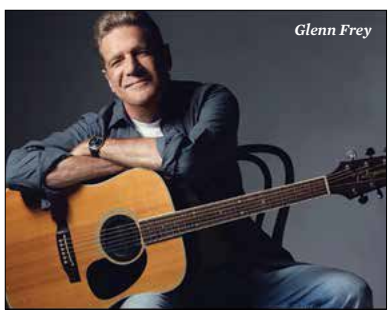
Fan via Jambands.com

Wow, my heroes are dropping like flies. RIP, Glenn. You leave an awesome legacy!

Paul via Jambands.com

Wow, that sucks. He looked like he had cleaned up and had been healthy for decades. Sorry to hear this.

Sweet Tooth via Relix.com


Glenn Frey

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The Sound Garden has been a staple of Baltimore's historic Fells Point neighborhood since 1993. While the store has moved to a larger location across the street from its original space, The Sound Garden remains one of the area's premiere vinyl outposts—and, just maybe, a popular stop for our cover stars, Charm City's own Animal Collective.

INSTAPRINT

Dead & Company rang in the new year at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. Guitarist John Mayer got the full Deadhead experience when NBA Hall of Famer—and renowned Deadhead—Bill Walton took over Bill Graham's role as Father Time. "What a memorable, magical show," Mayer wrote on his Instagram (@johnmayer).

Though the Grateful Dead spinoff, which also features Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann, Mickey Hart, Oteil Burbridge and Jeff Chimenti, will tour deep into at least 2016, Mayer will also reunite his John Mayer Trio with drummer Steve Jordan and bassist Pino Palladino.

FAN PHOTO

Primus performing at Live Oak, Fla.'s Suwannee Hulaween festival on Oct. 30, 2015. Photo by Brandt Vicknair.

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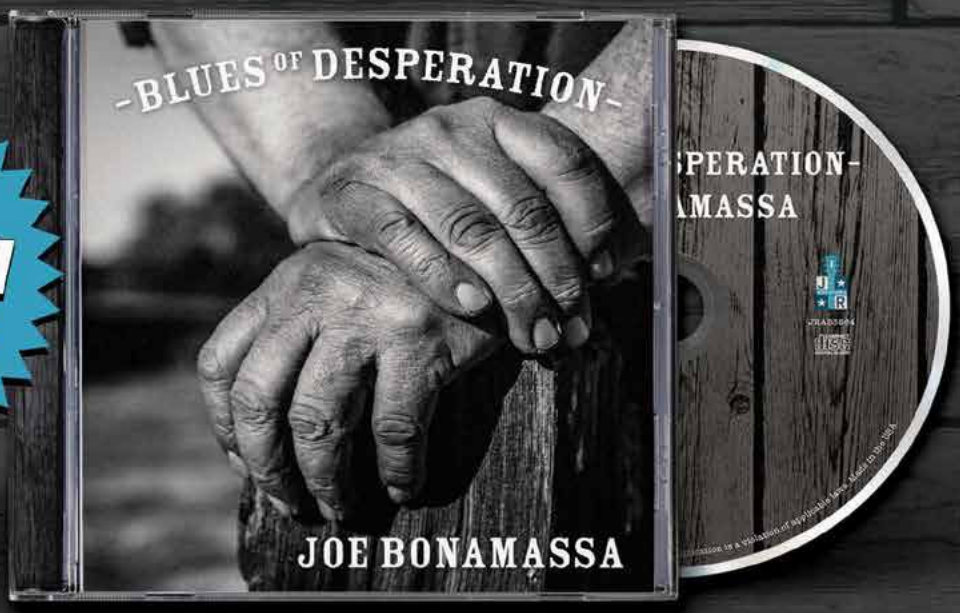

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Phish channel the "Martian Monster"

PHISH: RIVIERA MAYA

BARCELÓ MAYA // QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO JANUARY 15–17

BY MIKE GREENHAUS PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHAD SMITH

There's a fine line between a concert party-weekend and a true vacation, and **Phish**'s first trip south of the border walked that tightrope perfectly. The event took place along the sandy beaches of Riviera Maya at host resort Barceló Maya and a few nearby all-inclusive hotels, and offered three nights of music, four days of sunbathing and a decidedly post-camping smorgasbord of top-shelf offsite activities (snorkeling, zip-lining and a daytrip to at least one of the seven wonders of the new world, Chichén Itzá). Of course, many attendees opted for the choose-your-own adventure approach, whether that meant enjoying the resorts' maze of pools and beaches, visiting foodie destinations in nearby Tulum, or testing the limits of the event organizers' promise of 24-hour cuisine and entertainment.

Though band-centric destination events have gradually emerged as viable alternatives to the equally immersive modern mega-fest in recent years, Phish still played by their own rules. Besides the Barceló's entertaining mariachi show and *discothèque* sets by Magnaball after-hours favorites **DJ Freeworm and Franky Selector**, The Vermont Quartet were the only act on the long weekend's bill and stuck to their classic two-set format. But these were far from normal shows: Phish set up on a seldom-used stretch of beach and expanded their lighting rig, allowing fans to splash in the ocean while they played, and **Chris Kuroda** and **Jefferson Waful**, on loan from Umphrey's McGee, illuminated the water, trees and sand. Attentive waiters and bartenders kept the all-inclusive spirit alive throughout the performances.

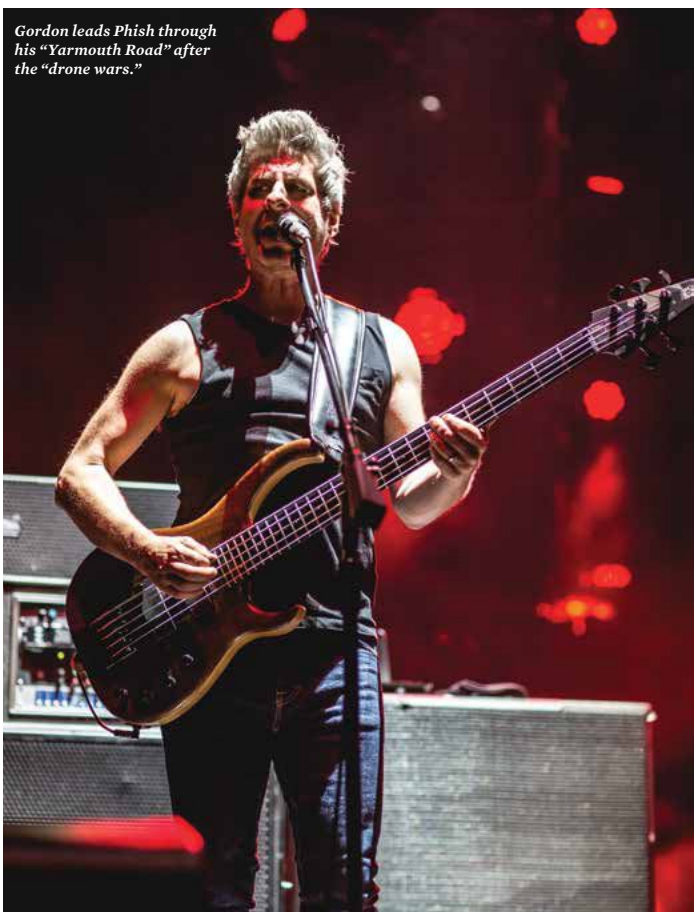
Musically, Phish arrived in Mexico incredibly warm after an inspired summer tour and celebratory New Year's Eve run, mixing pockets of deep improvisation with the type of fun, site-specific sing-alongs that seemed tailor-made for a beach vacation. The event-opening "A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing," along with "Free," "Sand," "Wading in the Velvet Sea" and "Bathtub Gin," and a first-time reading of Led Zeppelin's "The Ocean" during the weekend's final encore, fit the mood particularly well.

Many took the opening lines of "Camel Walk" as a nod to the aforementioned disco, and the rarely played *Round Room* ditty and unofficial event theme

"Juan" Fishman in action

"Happy happy oh my friend"

Though Phish will have a quiet winter, they actually played their most shows in January since 1990.



Gordon leads Phish through his "Yarmouth Road" after the "drone wars."

"Mexican Cousin" received a hero's welcome when it kicked off the celebration's final night.

The band also continued to spice their setlists with samples from *Chilling, Thrilling Sounds of the Haunted House*, most notably on the run's final evening, when they dusted off "Shipwreck" for the first time since its debut on Halloween in 2014. ("Martian Monster" also felt in line with the lighting design's sensory mysticism.) Phish pushed a number of songs into the ether throughout their stand, too, especially the mammoth one-two punch of "Sand" and "Ghost" on night one, covers of Talking Heads' slinky "Cities" and TV on the Radio's "Golden Age" on night two, and an almost-seamless second set on night three that kicked off with a nearly 20-minute "Down with Disease" and included a groovy "Crosseyed and Painless."

In certain ways, **Trey Anastasio** buried the lede during the event's penultimate set when he casually mentioned that Phish were planning to take some time off the road before their summer tour to work on a new album, while offhandedly making a joke about a drone interfering with **Mike Gordon**'s bass. Yet, most fans walked away with one overarching thought—Phish on dry land will never feel the same again.

The Bonnaroo of Indian Classical Music

George Harrison's sonic sanctuary still thrives, thanks to the Saptak Festival of Music

BY RICHARD GEHR

THERE WAS NO Ferris wheel, nor nearby bodies of velveteen water; no This Stage, That Stage, nor some Other Stage offering grazing options and/or sonic conflict and there were, for sure, no hoopers. And yet, the Saptak School of Music's annual festival in Ahmedabad, India, likely embodies the magic of improvised music more passionately than any other marathon musical event on the planet.

Every January since 1980, the Saptak Festival of Music has delivered the most prestigious names in Indian classical music (ICM) to local fans of all ages, with a kickoff on New Year's Day. This year, the not-for-profit fest scheduled 55 vocal and instrumental performances for 5,000 ticketholders, with an average nightly attendance of about 1,500. And I'm pretty sure I was the only U.S. citizen there for (nearly) the entire affair.

Located in the province of Gujarat and a few million strong, Ahmedabad is a dusty, pollution-prone confluence of nightmarish traffic, rampant capitalist aspirations, and the sort of sensory overload that India specializes in. Men still ride elephants down the street and sidewalk monkeys will give you the stink eye in this somewhat challenging metropolitan backdrop to Saptak's almost utopian refuge. In a country divided by rising nationalist fervor and religious division, Saptak models a community in which Muslims and Hindus coexist most respectfully. Truth is, Muslim musicians currently suffer at least as much discrimination in the West as an African-American jazz artist might have endured touring the South during most of the 20th century.

A prosaic setting helps Saptak's music sound all the more transcendent. Its single, flower-garlanded stage is the apex of an unusual, triangular space in the canvas-covered courtyard of the Amrut Mody School of Management. Most listeners prefer to remove their shoes and sit cross-legged on huge mats; less limber (i.e., older) audience members sit further back among those hideous white plastic chairs ubiquitous around the globe. The sound is terrific. Vendors sell vegetarian snacks (most Gujaratis eschew meat for religious reasons), chai tea, a deliciously comforting brew of hot saffron milk and paan, a flavorful mouth bomb of nuts and spices bound in a triangular betel-leaf pillow you tuck into your cheek.

The festival is programmed by co-founder Shrimati Manju Mehta, a respected sitar player in her own right, who alternated instrumentalists and vocalists over 13 evenings—four performances per night and two on Sunday mornings. The focus is on Hindustani (Northern Indian) classical music, a highly formal improvisational medium with roots extending a few thousand years into the past. Thanks to George Harrison pal and Woodstock star Pandit Ravi Shankar (who inaugurated Saptak 36 years ago), you've enjoyed Indian classical music's droning backgrounds and modal influences in jazz, rock and classical music by artists ranging from John Coltrane to Jerry Garcia to Philip Glass.

Saptak's schedule was loaded with ICM legends. Singers like Pandits Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha, noble exponents of the older Dagarvani dhrupad tradition; Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty, who rakes his long fingernails emphatically over his autoharp while singing short verses known as bandishes, which he subsequently deconstructs with almost scientific, yet ineffably stirring, precision; Shrimati Shujaat Mudgal, a finely nuanced classical vocalist whose pop music is no less elegant; and 86-year-old Vishwa Mohan, whose voice has lost some of its oomph but none of its immaculate control.

The top-tier instrumentalists included Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, who acknowledged ICM's considerable spiritual powers before weaving delicately romantic rhythms of almost electronic rigor on the santoor, a hammered dulcimer. Ustads Shujaat Khan and Shahid Parvez Khan brought near-rock intensity to their sitars, while the astounding Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt delivered perhaps the fortnight's most explosive performance on his modified slide guitar.

Among singers, the dazzlingly virtuosic Kaushiki Chakraborty (Ajoy Chakrabarty's daughter) and Shrimati Devaki Pandit are bringing new energy to ICM. Like Pandit Ravi's daughter Anoushka Shankar, they number among the many Indian musicians who are equally comfortable within the strict parameters of the raga form as well as in Bollywood playback studios and the myriad fusion experiments that are making elders look askance. They're also a great entryway into this beautiful, ever-fertile sonic realm.

Anoushka, who recently released *Home,* her first album of classical music in over a decade, drew the festival's biggest crowd on the combined basis of her lineage, glamorous appearance and remarkable stylistic clarity. After performing the elegantly melodic, 40-minute Raga Maru Bihag, Shankar and tabla player Bickram Ghosh encored with the so-called "Celebration" Raga Manj Khamaj, which her father famously played during Woodstock '69. Anoushka's version developed into a dazzlingly fast climax her album's rendition only hinted at.

And speaking of tabla players: Saptak features literally dozens of fleet-fingered rhythm scientists. Young men pressed forward to watch Pandits Kumar Bose and Anindo Chatterjee try to outdo one another in their contrasting styles. Rhythm is the equally important counterpart to melody in Indian music, and no drums in the world speak as articulately. As with everything else associated with this remarkable event, Bose and Chatterjee left one feeling exhilarated, awestruck, ecstatically overwhelmed.

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

The many colors of Umphrey's McGee

Keith Griner

UMPHREY'S MCGEE

BEACON THEATRE
NEW YORK, N.Y.
JANUARY 21

Since their first stop at New York's storied Upper West Side venue in 2013, **Umphrey's McGee**'s winter tour kickoff at the Beacon Theatre has turned into a welcome tradition. With each visit, the event has grown slightly grander, and this year's stand was slated as a three-night run before Winter Storm Jonas forced a cancellation of the final night.

However, the Chicago sextet's Friday night opener at the Beacon offered a fitting post-New Year's Eve survey of where the band stands, offering unique spins on their classic live staples, as well as encouraging new songs and musical tributes to the legendary musicians who passed on at the beginning of the year.

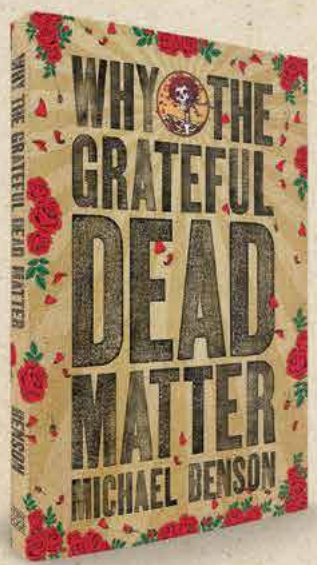
Take, for instance, "Plunger," a song that has found itself in heavy rotation since its debut in 2004. The group opted for a rare jam at the end of the tune, as opposed to the typically expanded middle section, resulting in one of the early highlights.

In December 2015, keyboardist **Joel Cummins** told Jambands.com that the band's new originals are their "lifeblood" and, during this evening's first set, the group mixed in two such songs, "In the Black" and the ultra-young "Attachments," alongside older tunes like "40's Theme," "Roulette," "Kimble" and "Rocker Part 2." "Attachments" ranks as one of the band's finest new songs since "Puppet String" emerged, alternating between a bluesy, falsetto section and a more arena-rock-centric chorus that the group has come to embrace on past studio efforts.

If the first set was a glimpse into the future of Umphrey's McGee, then the second was certainly a look back at their past, as they charged into a roaring, 20-minute "All in Time" that featured all of the dual-guitar fireworks from **Brendan Bayliss** and **Jake Cinninger** that fans have come to expect. The rest of the five-song second set saw the band pay tribute to the late Glenn Frey, who passed away just days earlier, with Cinninger singing a snippet of "You Belong to the City" during "Booth Love," as well as a standout pairing of "Bridgeless" and the Raw Stewage highlight "Remind Me," before "Tribute to the Spinal Shaft" (coupled with the end of "Bridgeless") closed the set.

As they often do, Umphrey's saved their best for last, filling the rest of their time at the Beacon with an all-David-Bowie affair by nodding to the Starman with the first verse of "Space Oddity" before a slinky "Fame" closed the show. ***Rob Slater***

"A glorious manifesto."
–Dennis McNally, Grateful Dead publicist, author of *A Long Strange Trip* and *On Highway 61*



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–Fred Goodman, author of *Allen Klein*

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DAVE RAWLINGS MACHINE

THE THEATRE AT ACE HOTEL
LOS ANGELES
JANUARY 16

At first, **Dave Rawlings**' genuinely jovial and neighborly greeting and smile seemed to contrast with the four ghostly, gray figures—dusty in hard denim and harder times—on the cover of his band's latest release, *Nashville Obsolete*. But on this final date of their U.S. tour, the echoes of the dark side still inhabited the haunting creep of "Bodysnatchers" and sober regret of "Pilgrim (You Can't Go Home)."

Though normally a quintet, on this evening, the ensemble were augmented by an additional guest fiddle player, who stood on a stage shadowed by towering sculptures, twisted and gilded, suggesting a gothic more ancient than Southern American. Drawing mainly from the band's two studio albums, over two-plus hours and two sets, Rawlings' group was as solitary and poignant as it was inclusive and infectious. Given room to showcase the accompanying sterling-silver talent, Rawlings' longtime partner, **Gillian Welch**, shared her own "Wayside/Back in Time" as she nursed a wounded harmonica through one more night, while multi-instrumentalist **Willie Watson** added some Americana grit to Charley Jordan's 1930s hit "Keep It Clean," and riffed one-liners about the obvious love Los Angeles has for the banjo. A pleasing rendition of "To Be Young (Is to Be Sad, Is to Be High)," co-written with Ryan Adams, and a gorgeous "Bells of Harlem" stirred the near-capacity audience, while an extended "The Trip" marked the first half at its most ponderous.

Following second stanza opener "Ruby," Watson and Welch outfitted their guitars with a $5 bill and hamburger receipt, respectively, for a durable and delicate "The Last Pharaoh." Then, a run at Bill Monroe's "He Will Set Your Fields on Fire," anchored by Punch Brothers bassist **Paul Kowert**, led to the double-entendre delight of "Sweet Tooth." Traditional "Stewball" had the crowd swinging and

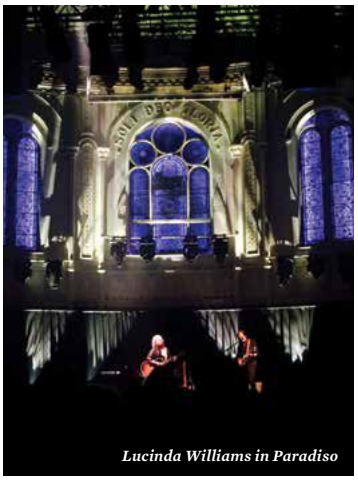
Rawlings & Co. remain evocative, effectual and raw

David Benjamin

singing in their seats, before "Short Haired Woman Blues" and Bob Dylan's "Queen Jane Approximately" brought the show to a temporary close.

A five-song double encore launched with Welch's "Look at Miss Ohio," then moved to a potent meld of "Method Acting" and Neil Young's "Cortez the Killer." It could be said at just about any time throughout the night that Rawlings is a brilliant and unpretentious guitarist, but it was in the dim corners of "Cortez" that some of his playing's deepest resonance was unearthed. One more round of collective singing on The Band's "The Weight" gave way to a final, single-mic stomp on "Didn't Leave Nobody but the Baby," and a tip of the cowboy hat goodbye. With nuanced simplicity and top-shelf musicianship, **Dave Rawlings Machine** conveyed rural Americana in its finest form—evocative, effectual and raw.

Larson Sutton



Lucinda Williams in Paradiso

LUCINDA WILLIAMS & BUICK 6

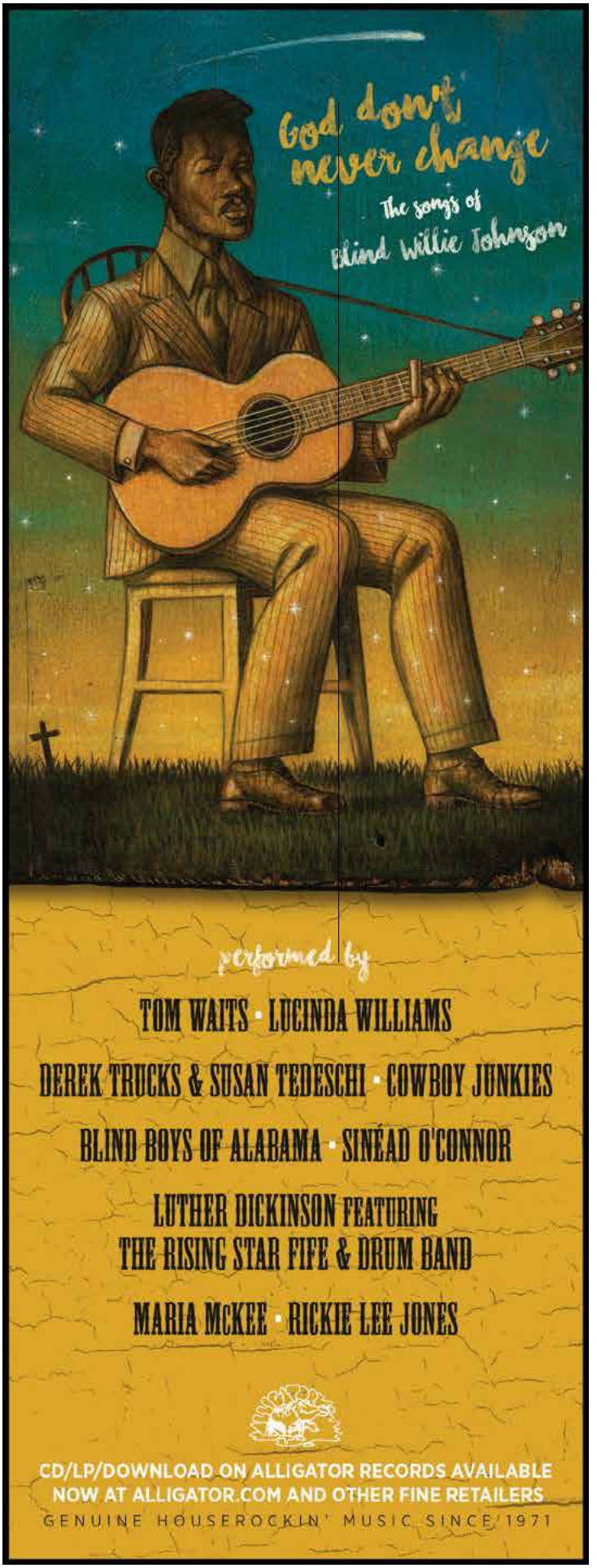
PARADISO AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS JANUARY 27

Lucinda Williams is an acquired taste and, once acquired, provides a deep experience unlike any other in country, blues or Americana. Williams' languorous voice produces a garbly, smudgy soul. Even her most tender material sounds hard-bitten and roughed-up, trying to figure out if it's snarling or resigned.

Amsterdam's legendary Paradiso, a converted church with echoing acoustics, was a remarkable fit for her live energy, which builds slowly, unfurling rather than spilling out, insisting an audience slow to its pace before seizing the crowd and wringing it out. She began with "Something Wicked This Way Comes," a funky, groovy, gospel-clotted number, sung with woozy rage, with her crack band, **Buick 6**, carrying the load behind her. That's pretty much how it went for two hours: testifying, moaning, disgusted and inspired songs, sometimes nipped with paint-peeling slide from lead guitarist **Stuart Mathis**. She'd step out of the scrum occasionally and just let the band—Mathis, bassist **David Sutton** and drummer **Butch Norton**—jam, never more effectively than on "Are You Down," which burned its way into psychedelic territory before returning to roadhouse grit.

The hallmarks were there: fan favorites like "Drunken Angel," "Cold Day in Hell" and "Honey Bee," a few songs reserved for solo and duo Lucinda, and healthy moments of political beehive-poking, including jibes at the Republican party and other *bête noires* during "Foolishness." And she was generous with her time, studding a five-song encore segment with Clash and Neil Young covers, then returning for a second encore with her own swampy "Get Right With God." It was a perfect benediction for her most singular form of musical religion, and you can be sure no one wanted to leave.

Chad Berndtson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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND

PRUDENTIAL CENTER
NEWARK, N.J.
JANUARY 31

Every artist has his or her "Holy Land." **Bruce Springsteen** has long been New Jersey's favorite son—he still has roots planted in the Garden State—so any area show feels like a special occasion. But this late-January date in support of Springsteen's new box set, *The Ties That Bind: The River Collection*, felt particularly like a homecoming. Returning to the concept that he first used in 2009, when the band played a classic album in its entirety at many of their shows on the Working on a Dream tour, Springsteen and his faithful **E Street Band** are recreating the deep-cut treasure trove *The River*, live each night on their early 2016 tour. During his Newark stop, Springsteen explained that this was the album where he "was trying to figure out where I fit in" as the 1970s faded away and the Big '80s began. *The River* was supposed to feel like "an E Street show" and, over 35 years since its release, their Jersey Shore roots are still palpable throughout the 20-song soundtrack.

The E Street Band took the stage with the lights still on just after 8 p.m., and for the next three-and-a-half hours, they left it all on the stage, as they've done since their salad days playing the bars of Asbury Park. After opening with "Meet Me in the City," a *River* outtake unearthed for the new collection, Springsteen launched into "The Ties That Bind" and ran through *The River* in its entirety. The second punch arrived just six songs into *The River* portion of the set, when The E Street Band moved into Springsteen's first big hit, the enduring anthem "Hungry Heart." Later, Springsteen offered a tender reading of the album's title track, which speaks to the economic struggles and small-town issues that became benchmarks of 1980s Middle-America rock. Not surprisingly, *The River* still sounds poignant in 2016 as a disenfranchised and fragmented nation prepares for another election cycle.

Springsteen knows that his faithful are still snapping up tickets in record time, mostly because they want to hear the hits and a few rarities. So, after almost two hours of *The River* material, The E Street Band helped The Boss give the people what they wanted. First, they pulled out three songs that hadn't yet appeared on his 2016 tour: "Lonesome Day," "Working on the Highway," and the often-covered "Atlantic City." Four songs later, the band left the stage after playing the ultimate classic, "Thunder Road." The show ended after a five-song encore that began with "Badlands" and climaxed with the only cover of the night, The Isley Brothers' "Shout." And, like all good concerts, the crowd left having sung every word of every song. You can't fake what Springsteen and The E Street Band do night after night. And nobody is sure how much longer they will do it for. But, over 15 years since Springsteen reunited The E Street Band, they remain as vital as ever.

Marc Millman

The River ***returns to Jersey***

Marc Millman

THE RADIATORS

TIPITINA'S
NEW ORLEANS
JANUARY 16

The Radiators built their legacy rocking crowded neighborhood juke joints in the Crescent City and touring on the jamband circuit for decades, before formally parting ways almost six years ago. But, despite retiring from the road, the treasured Cajun rock-and-roll quintet has reunited for a few hometown gigs every January since 2011.

After two sold-out performances at Tipitina's Uptown—night one included a sit-in by **George Porter Jr.**—Saturday's festivities got underway at 11:11 p.m. Staying true to longtime Rads tradition, the "band of dreams and red beans" laid down a 1987 "mini-cut," the slinky "Law of the Fish," and then instructed attendees to get in the "Mood to Move." The crowd was mostly composed of those who likely saw the Rads with fewer gray hairs onstage (and in the crowd), but younger fans weren't in short supply by any stretch, and the multi-generational audience shared a communal affection for this legendary band.

Keyboardist **Ed Volker** can still play the role of frontman when he takes the spotlight, as he showed on the energetic, free-flowing blues rocker "Sparkplug." Volker's warm vocals encapsulate New Orleans soul, always drenched in a heavy Louisiana drawl.

It was hard not to draw comparisons to vintage Dire Straits when hearing the Rads blow through the swaggering "This Wagon's Gonna Roll," a roiling psych-blues that guitarist **Camile Baudoin** ripped

The Rads reunite (again) in NOLA

Wesley Hodges

through with pentatonic virtuosity.

The night's highlight came at the end of the first set with "River Run," featuring an extensive improvisational workout that found Baudoin and **Dave Malone** trading off rhythm and lead duties seamlessly, staying in lockstep in the groove.

The good times rolled on in the second set with the signature "Cocktail Music," a quintessentially New Orleans rocker—and a song that arguably has one of the all-time great music videos. Set two's take on The Rolling Stones' boisterous "19th Nervous Breakdown" gave **Reggie Scanlan** a chance to tackle the tune's descending bass dive bombs that Bill Wyman made famous.

Fans who made it through all three nights were likely in a midwinter fever dream—it was still hot inside—by the time the sixth and final set roared to a satisfying conclusion. You never know how many reunion runs are left, and those who packed the yellow house over a long weekend were handsomely rewarded and left with yet another lasting memory of hanging with the Rads, one of rock-and-roll's best party bands on either side of the Mississippi. ***Wesley Hodges***

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Erica Zimmerman

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

IN 1992, ERICA Zimmerman moved to Boulder, Colo., and immediately immersed herself in the city's robust live music scene. After living in the area for five years, she answered an ad in a local paper for a job at the Boulder Theater box office. Zimmerman became the box office manager in 2001 and also took on that role at Boulder's Fox Theatre in 2010. When she's not working at either venue, Zimmerman brings her expertise to festivals such as Austin City Limits, Lollapalooza, All Good, Telluride Bluegrass Festival, Sonic Bloom and, most recently, ARISE.

What was the live music scene like where you grew up?

I grew up in a small suburb of Providence, R.I., so there was really no music scene for me. My parents weren't into music and my sisters were much older than I was. I got my first taste of music in college—my first college roommate was horrified that I didn't know anything about music. She played me The Beatles and CSNY, but the big one for me was the Grateful Dead. She played me a bootleg, and I was immediately hooked. I went to as many shows as possible during my two years in Upstate New York at Hartwick College. Then, my dad pulled me out of Hartwick and sent me to Northern Arizona University, where he was a dean, and I got free tuition. I continued my touring—this time on the West Coast.

What was your first job in the music business, and what led you to that role?

My first job was as a box office clerk at the Boulder Theater in 1997. I saw an ad in the paper and couldn't believe it. By this time, I had been living in Boulder for about five years and had been to the Boulder Theater many times for bands like Leftover Salmon, The Samples and even a Marley or two. I was pregnant, but promised them that I would keep the job after my son was born. I kept my word and I've been there ever since. I'm currently the box office manager at the Boulder and the Fox. Kirk Peterson was a big influence on me and taught me to stay humble. Kirk was the talent buyer at the Boulder Theater from 2001–2009, and then [at both] the Boulder and Fox through 2013. He has remained true to himself throughout his career, and I really admire that in him.

What is a memorable story or experience from your time at the Boulder and the Fox?

My most memorable show was sometime in the late '90s when the Buena Vista Social Club played at the Boulder Theater. I remember standing and watching them, thinking that I was involved in an important part of history. They had a hard time even getting the visas to come to the U.S.

My most memorable experience was when I was working the box office one Saturday morning. I had just opened the doors and someone came up while I wasn't paying attention and asked to purchase a T-shirt. He handed me a $100 bill. I was a little pissed off because I now had to go open the safe to make change for one T-shirt. I looked up and it was Robert Plant. I was so flustered that I couldn't open the safe at all and just gave him the T-shirt. He loves coming to the Boulder Theater because he met the love of his life here. He comes in from time to time when he is in the area—he'll just come to any show we have going on and sit up in the balcony.

What are your worst days like?

My worst days are when shows get cancelled, and we have to quickly contact everyone and give them the bad news and begin the grueling task of refunding everyone's money. The best part of the job is helping people—when I can assist someone who doesn't expect to be helped with a ticket exchange or some seating issue at a show and they walk out satisfied. The worst part is telling people "no." It's that simple in box-office world.

How has your job changed from when you started?

Technology has changed my job immensely, with the digital ticket technology and scanners at the door instead of ripping tickets. Scalpers play a huge role in my day as does credit card fraud. It's just not as innocent and easy as it used to be. For the older folks, it is confusing and can turn them off and away from coming to see live music. For the younger generation, they can buy a ticket on their phone, decide they want to go to a party instead, send the ticket to a friend, have the friend pull the ticket up on their phone at the door and they are in—all in the course of about 20 minutes.

When does your day end?

It's 24/7—isn't everyone's in the music business? If not, no one told me.

Signature Sounds

Getting dropped isn't necessarily a bad thing BY ALLEN STONE

MY INITIAL GOAL for *Radius* was to create a record that would make people say, "What's this?" I wanted to make something fresh, something that people hadn't heard before. I've seen lots of trends—a band will come out with a record that does really well, and then 85 other bands will make the same record.

My last, self-titled record was thrown together. We did it on the producer's dollar. He was extremely gracious and financed that record, but it didn't allow me the freedom I had this time around. So I went into *Radius* with more precision and focus. I really wanted to find a signature sound—something where people would know it was an Allen Stone song when they heard it.

I hopped around to a lot of different producers and songwriters and nothing really stuck—it was all sounds that I'd heard or sung before. Then, I spent two weeks writing with my friend Magnus Tingsek just to see what happened. I wrote three songs within the first week and knew that we could manipulate a sound that would stand alone from some other records. So we holed up in this studio in Sweden for about three months to make this record, and the rest is history.

The second song we wrote together, "Fake Future," felt like it had a new color to it. Funny enough, that song is about the influx of technology in live music. There's this portion of technology that has found its way into art and live music, and nobody seems to talk about how weird that is. My beef is not with this electronica, synthesized world, it's that you're losing a musical tradition. I think it's more of an overwhelming trend in human culture.

I imagine that music started in a cave: One guy had a rock and another had a stick. They communicated with sound and rhythm even before they communicated with words. And now, we're getting to the point where it's just all about the lights. If you look at those old jambands—Crosby, Stills & Nash and the bands at Woodstock—they had two light cans on the entire stage and, today, we still talk about them.

Initially, I really gravitated toward singers like Donny Hathaway and Stevie Wonder. When I discovered Soulive and Lettuce, they were the first bands that I had heard who were continuing that tradition—paying homage to that era and musical spirit—but adding new chops and a new vibe to what they were doing. Art should tell the story of the human in that day and age. To a degree, we are obsessed with computers—with a machine doing something for us faster and easier—so that music is telling our story. But losing that human, musical element breaks my heart.

Radius came out on Capitol in May and now we are re-releasing it on ATO. I wish there was a poignant and interesting story there—that I banged out one of the executives and there was this crazy dilemma involved with our romantic relationship. But it was that classic label scenario. I signed with two executives, made an 18-track record, mixed and mastered it, and my captain and my co-captain blew rainbows up my ass saying, "Oh, this is amazing! This is groundbreaking!"

Then two weeks later, they left and an entire new A&R team took over my project. They didn't sign me; they never saw my live show, which is a huge part of my music and my art. I'm pretty sure at least one of them disliked my music and said, "Go back in the studio—we need a hit." This juxtaposition started happening. When you're an album artist, the last thing you want is to record extra songs with producers who haven't been involved in the creative process.

At the end of the day, I'm not curing cancer. I'm not a brain surgeon. My life is *stupid* blessed, and the fact that I get to make music and put food on my table is so outlandish that no situation can bring me down. If you're a musician in that downward spiral, then you need to get out of the industry fast.

We put the record out and they threw that single on the radio and it didn't work. More people than ever were showing up to our shows, but as far as a commercially successful record goes, it was nowhere near major-label standards. I walked into the label after about six months and said, "Look, you guys have been gracious to me. I really appreciate the help you've given me thus far, but I really would like you to drop me."

Looking back, that's a pretty ridiculous request—to ask a label to drop you—and they were quite shocked. But they went for it and, luckily, we have a good enough relationship with ATO that they were willing to take on the project and re-release the record the way that I had initially intended.

Usually, a label will just shelve you, forget about you and end up dropping you three years later. I wanted to avoid that. To not have the ability to release new material would have really soured my taste for music and art. My life and my art are about playing live for people. I write records so that I can play them live.

Allen Stone will release an expanded version of Radius *on March 25 via ATO. The label also issued his self-titled breakthrough in 2011.*

A band of Brothers: Neal Casal, Tony Leone, Adam MacDougall, Chris Robinson (l-r)

The Chris Robinson Brotherhood

The CRB follow the golden road to unlimited authenticity

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

CHRIS ROBINSON is lounging on a sofa near a studio cat, wearing socks (but no shoes) and sipping tea, while mouthing the words to a song whose lyrics he hasn't finished. "We were looking for a change in our recording situation," Robinson says as he strokes his trademark beard, which seems to distinguish the psychedelic mystic who's spent the past decade exploring cosmic-Americana from the blues-rocker who came of age playing with The Black Crowes in the early '90s. "In so many ways, the aesthetics of this place offer that—even the vibrations of the house. It helps you clear your mind."

It's mid-January and The Chris Robinson Brotherhood are two weeks into the recording of their fourth, currently untitled studio effort at their adopted home studio in a corner of Marin County they've dubbed Unicorn, Calif. The band's namesake recently relocated to the area from Los Angeles, and the rest of the Brotherhood have spent most of the calendar year living out their *Big Pink* fantasies in a mansion-cum-studio just steps away from the Dead's mail-order kingdom in Stinson Beach, Calif. The house is literally composed of San Francisco's bedrock—built by hand in the 1960s from Frisco stone and jettisoned wooden ships—and offers huge picture windows that overlook the Pacific Ocean and its quintessential golden road, Highway 1.

Most of Robinson's compadres have been living at the studio—guitarist Neal Casal scored a crash pad nearby through his Hard Working Americans associate, Widespread Panic bassist Dave Schools—and at least one band member loves the space so much that he's considering renting it via Airbnb when they're finished recording instead of going home.

The mansion's living room has been repurposed as the tracking room where the group has already laid down over 15 songs—many in varying styles and lengths—and a few tapestries and an oversized CRB flag are used to partition off a makeshift vocal booth. The CRB always travel with a turntable and a vinyl collection that rivals many indie record stores, so it isn't surprising that a sizable portion of the room is reserved for the stereo setup.

"We've always felt more like a San Francisco band than an LA band, which is what we started out as," says Casal, who, after years on the hipster rock-club circuit, is finally getting credit as a forefather of the modern post-jam scene, thanks to his work on Fare Thee Well's setbreak music *Circles Around the Sun* and his association with Robinson. "This is where we were embraced first—we have most of our closer musical, artistic friends up here."

Though the Brotherhood has logged in hundreds of dates on the road and countless hours in the studio since forming in 2011, these sessions feel like the

Allison Bridges Robinson

group's first true *band* record—mostly because it's their first self-produced album. It's also the first release to feature their new drummer, Ollabelle co-founder and Levon Helm bandmate Tony Leone, who joins Robinson, Casal and latter-day Crowes keyboardist Adam MacDougall. Despite their surroundings, so far, the sessions have taken a slight turn away from Deadhead country and moved deeper into psychedelic soul, folk balladry and *Holland*-era Beach Boys.

"We all sit at this table together, we have lunch together," Casal says. "Chris, Tony and Adam make food for everyone—the joints are rolled right there. And the writing happens right there on the couch. It's been an authentic process."

"We're of a certain age where we think, 'I want to hear the studio version,'" Robinson adds as he bops around in front of a recording console and describes the origins of a song tentatively titled "Give Us Back Our Loving Days," which is based off a soundcheck jam. "At my base, I'm a songwriter. Records are still representative of a period of time in our lives. You head out into the pasture and you bring them all in, and then you check them out. If other people think the album format is antiquated, then so be it."

THEM CHANGES

CHRIS ROBINSON: A little before the end of last year, we needed to make some changes. So when Tony came on board, we all looked at each other and said, "We're not going to really have new material, but we're gonna roll up our sleeves and hit the road. Let's stick it out there." We accomplished a lot of things that we set out to do, and not just musically. In a weird way, we saw this as the harvest: "Oh, my god, it's ripe. Let's get in there and pick it off the tree." It had been a while since we'd been in that type of situation and, honestly, it's important. If we had been in a rehearsal space in Los Angeles, I don't think we would have had these mystic vibes, those magic moments where everything just flows and it's not work at all. We've changed our set, our setting and our scene—a lot of stuff has changed in our world since our last recording.

LIP SERVICE

CR: It's just lip service. Everyone has a company line, but if you're an athlete, you don't have to see it or hear it to prove it. In our weird case with this band and how our year ended, putting in that hard work meant that the audiences got bigger and more people were listening to what we had to say with our music. That was the initial concept—"How do you get to more people?" For us, it was never going to be, "We got [our music] into a car commercial." You have to have deep music, a soulful experience, because we know the trip, man. We know the vibe. That's our manifesto.

GROUP THINK

NEAL CASAL: It crossed my mind a couple times when we decided to produce this album as a group: We're going to be making decisions on tape. Who knows what that can turn into? But it's another testament to this group of people and the time that we spend together—how well we know each other, how we're all on the same [wavelength] and know what we're after. We're playing multiple takes of songs and we're writing them on the spot. There's a lot of work that is going into this creative process. And you could easily get caught up in disagreements and differences of opinion about picking the "right" take of a song. But there's this collective feeling. It might take us a few listens to bat it around a little bit, but it doesn't take too long for us to generally feel the same way about what we're doing.

EMOTIONAL COMMERCE

CR: A lot of my perception in life—my dyslexic perception—is about the duality of things, and I've been trying to find the duality in my lyrics. Ultimately, our main goal is to make the vibe and the music that we would be happiest to hear, as opposed to an entire industry that's still pointed toward: "I can get you in the door. I need you to sound like this and wear a yellow hat." If you look at it as a prism of being super free, then we have this luxury. We only have to answer to our own criteria—what we think is deep, what we think is interesting, what we think is dynamic, what we think has great emotional commerce.

Family time in the studio

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

NC: We were working on a song [in the living room,] and Chris was throwing his ideas out at us. We were getting close to finishing it, but we needed another part. Chris left the house and went outside to a bench under these trees to work on some lyrics. I didn't know where he had gone, so I went out to the other side of the house to the deck with an acoustic guitar, trying to come up with this part. When I came up with it, I came in and I said, "Where's Chris?" Somebody said, "He's out there." So I walked out with my guitar, found him and said, "Check this out." He said, "I like it." We came in and finished the tune. That's what you get out of a place like this. You get to walk outside into your little stand of trees and just work on your ideas and bring them back together.

DEADHEAD DNA

CR: We're recording just down the road from the spot where Jerry was really at his best. But, in a weird way, this album is the least that we have been influenced by him.

NC: To help start the band, the Grateful Dead model helped get us on our feet conceptually. But now that we are on our feet, and we've developed our own identity, it's not as necessary a touchstone for us. It's there in our fabric because the DNA of the band was built through that. We've all been doing our time—Tony, as a Deadhead kid, has seen more shows than any of us, but I saw my share and Chris saw his share, and we've been playing with Phil.

EXPANSIVE AMBITION

CR: Our ambition—what we are doing musically and what we've bitten off—is expansive in nature. That's part of what was interesting about [the 2012 releases] *Big Moon Ritual* and *The Magic Door*, and what we were trying to do with that situation. Conventional wisdom would have said, "Take the best songs from both records and make one record, blah blah blah." If you're Adele, then you only get to put out one record every three or four years because so many people are trying to get their Christmas bonus off of her singing. We have the luxury of being free from that. So, that also gives us this great place to be super creative with not only *what* we release, but *how* and *when* we release things. It's art-driven. We'll see what lies on the horizon. It should be equally as creative as we are with the music, equally as creative as how it's put out there.

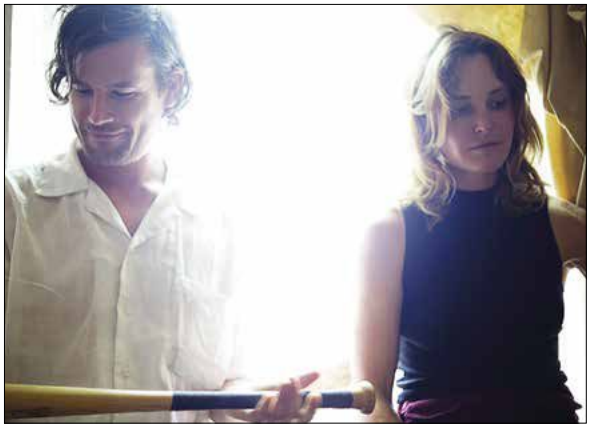
Allison Bridges Robinson

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Little May SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

NEW MUSIC, OLD FRIENDS

It hasn't taken long for Australian outfit **Little May** to explode onto the international music scene, but their relationship actually dates back further than their music. Lead guitarist **Annie Hamilton** has known drummer **Kat Hunter** since they were five, and vocalists **Liz Drummond** and **Hannah Field** met in high school. "None of us had ever really been in bands before," says Hamilton. "It all just slotted together really naturally. Everything we were all doing seemed to be working." With tight harmonies and expressive hooks, the group quickly gained national acclaim and began bringing their show to other countries, which proved to be a different, but familiar-feeling, experience. "It's very weird for us to come to somewhere like Philly and have people turning up because they know our music," says Hamilton. "But it's nice, because it's like going back to the kind of gigs that we were playing maybe, like a year ago, in Sydney." For their full-length debut, *For the Company*, Little May landed their dream producer, The National's Aaron Dessner. "At first, we were all definitely very starstruck," Hamilton admits. "But he was trying to find what Little May was at its core and then build the record around that. I think he did a really good job." www.littlemaymusic.com ***Matt Inman***



Gun Outfit LOS ANGELES

THE PSYCHEDELIC WILD, WILD WEST

In old Western speak, a gun outfit refers to a roving band of gunmen hired to ensure safe passage through the dark corridors of the Wild West. These outfits were typically friends who came and went from the group and possessed a deep knowledge of pastoral American lands. "When I read that there was a fluidity to the gangmanship, I thought that was a good name for playing music with different people at different times," says guitarist and vocalist **Carrie Keith**. Formed nearly a decade ago on the western shores of Olympia, Wash., a town known as much for its punk rock past as its hippie college scene, **Gun Outfit** began as a bedroom recording project between Keith and local noise musician **Dylan Sharp**, who found inspiration in both of those schools and drew comparisons to the male/female vocal pairing of Sonic Youth. From a duo to a bass-less trio, the group gradually emerged from their DIY upbringing with a country-psych sound that alternately calls to mind both Hüsker Dü and the Grateful Dead. A few years back, the original duo packed up from Olympia and moved down to LA, where they added a bassist and tracked their fourth album, *Dream All Over*—by far their most actualized to date. "It's like this slow train," says Keith. Much like the gun outfits of yore, few seem better suited to guide you on a harrowing journey. It's music that beckons for the trail, the road, the trip.

www.gunoutfit.us ***Sam Davis***

Hemming PHILADELPHIA

FROM "REALITY" TO REAL

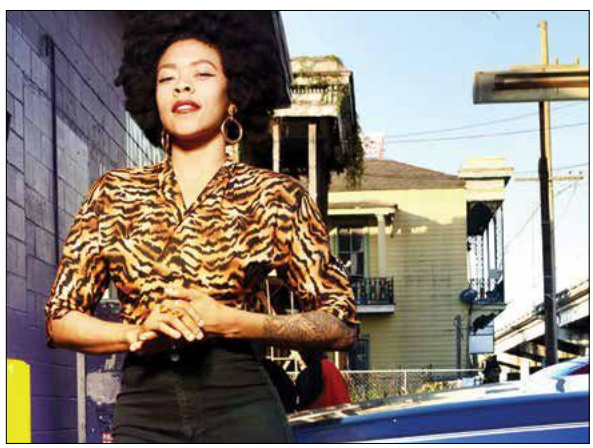
Candace Martello was fronting a two-piece punk outfit in Philadelphia when she received a very unexpected invitation to be part of a new reality television show hosted by Linda Perry. Though that isn't exactly the traditional method for discovering authentic singer-songwriters, Martello thrived under the glare of the ever-present camera. "It was very surreal," she says. "Such a weird, stressful experience. But I was fine—I do well under pressure." This kind of confidence wasn't always present in Martello, who couldn't even bring herself to sing in front of her high-school bandmates, let alone a crowd. "When I would write a song, I would have to take the microphone and guitar into a separate room and shut the door, then sing it to my bandmates there." Now Martello, who records under the name **Hemming**, has ditched the punk sound but not the attitude. Recording her debut album under the production and guidance of Perry, who Martello praises for her easygoing studio demeanor, Hemming has found her voice with a collection of powerful and engaging songs that she put to good use when called on to support Chris Cornell's recent national acoustic tour.

www.hemmingmusic.com ***Matt Inman***

Escort BROOKLYN, N.Y.

DISCO MAGIC

Who says one gig can't make a difference? Keyboardist **Eugene Cho** and guitarist **Dan Balis** had been producing authentic-sounding disco tracks to augment their **Escort** DJ sets since the mid-aughts, when they were asked to play Long Island City's popular PS1 Warm Up concert series. The show was a huge success, and *Time Out New York* named it as one of the best of 2007. This kicked off the current phase of Escort's existence, and with the addition of bassist/singer **Adeline Michèle**—you may recognize her from *The Meredith Viera Show*—Escort became a true live band in 2009. "That's when the whole sound of the band really took shape," says Cho. "With Adeline's personality, voice and ideas, the music really started developing an identity." And her impact on the group is evident both sonically and visually— her aesthetic informs Escort's current stage show, which is a circus of colors and lights. She elaborates, saying, "We were being called a great live band, which was flattering, but we really wanted to live up to that title. We brought a choreographer in and started dressing up more and it really became a conscious effort to have a great live show." Escort are still focused on the studio too, though, as their recently released sophomore full-length, *Animal Nature*, clearly demonstrates. "When we first started making records, we were trying to imitate something that we liked," explains Cho of the band's disco-magic sound. "Now that we've done it a few times, we can develop a sound that's a little bit more sophisticated." www.weareescort.com ***Wayan Zoey***



Nikki Hill DURHAM, N.C.

EQUAL PARTS STAPLE SINGERS AND AC/DC

Nikki Hill's secret recipe: Take equal parts AC/DC metal stomp, revved-up rockabilly punk, and scorching, modern electric blues; add overflowing spoonfuls of raw, edgy jump blues and R&B, and Staple Singers soul. Hill took all of that, blended it at 11, and what poured from her speakers was one fiery, passionate soul-shouter with plenty of attitude and the grooves to back it up. "Being an artist with a lot of vintage references is cool, but at the same time, you don't want to be perceived as a complete throwback. It's not everything that I am," Hill says. "I mean, I am not reinventing the wheel by any means, but I make things fresh." The North Carolina native grew up listening to oldies and singing gospel, while a brief detour in a punk band cemented her ability and confidence. Hill's soulful roots burst forth when husband/guitarist **Matt Hill** rescued her from a bartending job. Initially a duo, though now a full band, acts such as The Bo-Keys utilized Hill's voice on their recordings as well. *Heavy Hearts, Hard Fists* is Hill's long-awaited, rousing debut. "There's just something about the music that makes me feel good; that makes people feel good," she exclaims. "That's why I'm doing it!"

www.nikkihillmusic.com ***Glenn BurnSilver***

Cage The Elephant

BY ROB SLATER

Cage The Elephant frontman Matt Shultz pauses for a second, takes a deep breath and calmly states, "He's a visionary. Obviously." Shultz isn't referring to one of the longtime bandmates in his Bowling Green, Ky., outfit or Dan Auerbach, the all-star producer behind their latest LP, *Tell Me I'm Pretty*. He's talking about the late David Bowie, a man that Shultz identifies as one of his favorite artists of all time. The 32 year old chooses his words carefully when discussing Bowie, further expanding, "I've always known [Bowie's art] was super powerful, super strong. But he's one of those artists that—even as highly regarded as he was—it continues to grow."

That same sentiment can be applied to Shultz and the rest of Cage The Elephant as well, who—a decade into their career—are more popular and adventurous than ever. While the band has only broken into the modern-rock mainstream in recent years, many of their peers saw the star potential of Shultz and his bandmates—older brother and guitarist Brad, drummer Jared Champion and bassist Daniel Tichenor—from the beginning.

Cage The Elephant supported Queens of the Stone Age on their first real tour, and they managed to impress often-skeptical onlookers at South By Southwest. Their 2008 self-titled debut included the critic favorite "Ain't No Rest for the Wicked" and the quintet became festival mainstays shortly thereafter. They've also spent time on the road with Foo Fighters and Auerbach's Black Keys, where they struck up a bond that would result in *Tell Me I'm Pretty*. Dave Grohl even filled in for a few gigs when drummer Jared Champion's appendix burst. (Founding guitarist Lincoln Parish left the group on friendly terms in December 2013, and has been replaced by touring keyboardist/guitarist Matthan Minster and lead guitarist Nick Bockrath, the latter of whom is an alum of American Babies and Disco Biscuits associates Nicos Gun.)

"He really understands how to seriously blend contemporary with classic," Shultz says of Auerbach's production approach, which marks a change from Jay Joyce, who produced the group's first three records. "He's very much a chef. He knows his tones and textures." Shultz references a few Auerbach-produced records as his favorites, including Dr. John's *Locked Down*, Lana Del Rey's *Ultraviolence*, Ray LaMontagne's *Supernova* and Bombino's *Nomad*.

Brad Shultz first played Auerbach some demos the band had been working on while they were on tour together in 2014, and The Black Keys guitarist jumped at the chance to produce the follow-up to 2013's *Melophobia*, which Matt refers to as an "instant gratification" record for him. "[*Melophobia*] was a rough record to make, but when it was done, I was still far enough removed that I pretty quickly enjoyed what we had done," he notes. With *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, the feeling wasn't quite the same.

"I was maybe a little too close," he says of the album's subject matter. "We always talk about trying to reach this higher level of transparency, and maybe, to a certain degree, it was a little too much on *Tell Me I'm Pretty*. Some of it is like journal entries."

Shultz dives in further: "And possibly connecting some kind of undercurrent of self-hatred, I instinctually had negative feelings about the record at first. I see a lot of my flaws in the album, and I didn't like looking at that."

As he carefully explains what made *Tell Me I'm Pretty* a hit with the band's loyal fanbase, he attributes it to an ideal that rang true with the man he spoke of earlier, David Bowie. "Honesty always wins," he says, lamenting the "selfie generation" that seems to overrun the world today. "It's a powerful statement of honesty, especially within the social climate—the way that we're kind of curating the presentation of our lives."

The album's title, which could be mistaken for a lost New York Dolls record, also addresses that current social climate. While the album's name actually stems from a friend's offhanded comment one night, Shultz felt it was a fitting summation of the record's overarching theme. "It has a really dark underbelly," he says of the title. "It also deals with people's unquenchable thirst for acceptance, so we thought it would be interesting to [address] that."

Shultz laughs when he surveys the band's touring schedule for the year, which includes numerous festivals and a tour package with Silversun Pickups (a band that Cage opened for early in their career), Foals and Bear Hands, as well as a special gig with Metallica in San Francisco. "We're super stoked," Shultz says. "I'd call them The Beatles of metal, but they're their own thing."

GIVERS

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

It was April 2012 and Taylor Guarisco was feeling frisky. GIVERS had just finished a career-reaffirming set in support of their bouncy, breakout indie-pop debut on their home turf at The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, performing right before Bon Iver. The band invited Justin Vernon to come to their late-night show at One Eyed Jacks, and, despite whatever festival ADD he was facing, the Bon Iver singer showed up with some of his bandmates.

"Justin said, 'Where are you making the second record, bro?' and I said, 'I don't know, your house?'" Guarisco says with a wry grin while en route to get his wisdom teeth removed. "I was feeling bold, but Justin said, 'Well, I have this place in Wisconsin...'"

That barroom hang led to a more formal conversation and, less than two years later, Guarisco and the rest of the Lafayette, La.-bred GIVERS found themselves holed up in snowy Eau Claire at Vernon's April Base Studios, knocking out tracks for their sophomore—and surprisingly hip-hop-inspired—record, *New Kingdom*.

"We had this morning ritual where we'd have breakfast, Justin would come in and nod his head to whatever we were working on, and then he'd go into his part of the studio and we'd go back to work. We'd meet in the living room later, have a beer and rock out to whatever we'd been working on," Guarisco says. "He was in the final stages of mixing The Staves album, and we were mutual cheerleaders. We brought in the cake for Mardi Gras."

However, GIVERS' path from Jazz Fest's Gentilly Stage to Vernon's souped-up residential recording space and, finally, to *New Kingdom*'s November release was decidedly more "nomadic." The group—Guarisco (guitar, vocals), Tiffany Lamson (percussion, ukulele, vocals), Kirby Campbell (drums, percussion), Josh LeBlanc (bass, guitar, trumpet) and latter addition Nick Stephan (keyboards, saxophone, samples, flutes)—burst out of Louisiana and onto the kaleidoscopic festival scene in 2011 with their bubbly, rhythmic indie-pop introduction, *In Light*. (Lamson and Guarisco first planted the seeds for what would become GIVERS in 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when they were both forced to evacuate the Crescent City.)

"There's a looseness and freeness to the way we develop songs that can be attributed to the New Orleans approach—the freedoms of improvisation and playing off of each other in any given moment," Lamson says. "That's definitely one of our avenues to get to certain places within a song—using the feel of a moment more so than the over-analytical thought of it."

GIVERS signed to Glassnote during a period when labelmates Mumford & Sons and Phoenix were rising from buzz-band status to cultural icons, and their joyous anthem "Up Up Up," which married chipper hooks with adventurist Afro-funk grooves and an appreciation for art-rock production, became a crossover hit. The band even scored placement in a Lipton iced tea commercial.

"We toured a year before *In Light* and for two years after, so we all needed a few months with no shows," Guarisco confesses of the whirlwind period. "After that downtime, we all got cabin fever." Instead of booking some studio space and jumping right into recording, Guarisco, Lamson and their pals rented a vacation home in Banner Elk, N.C., and spent time cooking up song ideas. *In Light* engineer Korey Richey joined the group for the sessions, driving with a U-Haul full of his gear straight from working with Arcade Fire on the Carnaval-inspired *Reflektor*. They came in with a few sonic blueprints and song sketches, but weren't afraid to "follow their accidents" as they developed into new ideas. They continued workshopping those ideas in False River, La. and recording commenced in Maurice shortly after.

"The owner of the house would have freaked," Guarisco says of their time in Banner Elk. "We moved all the furniture out to set up our gear and had cords running through the living room. The songs started taking shape and we took those ideas to Wisconsin."

After laying down some more tracks at Vernon's pad, the group finished the record back in New Orleans and Maurice. In total, they found themselves with about 50 song sketches that they eventually whittled down to the baker's dozen that ended up on *New Kingdom*. While the album retains *In Light*'s charm and chorus-like energy, *New Kingdom* also weaves in some left-field hip-hop and R&B touchstones on songs like "Bermuda," "Growls" and "Lightning."

"Everyone in the group loves hip-hop—that production approach," Guarisco explains, noting their shift away from "happy Afrobeat."

"There are some songs where Tiff and I write out the lyrics like traditional singer-songwriters. Then, there is a song like 'Bermuda,' where we had a cool, funky, programmed beat and we just started freestyling—rapping—over it. It is something we do for fun all the time and that is truly the spirit of this band. We were a different set of people by the time we started making these songs."

Lamson adds: "'Lightning' was born in a similar fashion, with a bit more of an R&B approach. Tracks like 'Growls' were chopped and edited to create a world in which experimentation could occur more freely—vocal samples were a big part of the initial foundation of the track, then the beat was programmed out and layered with live/electronic percussion and instrumentation to create a larger, electro-Bollywood-sounding landscape."

New Kingdom wasn't the first time that the members of GIVERS changed course. Before they coalesced as GIVERS, most of the group cut their chops playing in instrumental-oriented jazz and funk projects—Guarisco even toured in a zydeco act. "In middle school and high school, that was my only out," Guarisco says. "Everything else was white-boy shit I couldn't get behind. GIVERS was the first time we experimented with lyrics. I had never sang in a band before; Tiff had never sang lead in a band before."

That adventurous spirit continued to guide GIVERS as they worked on their sophomore record, yet they were careful to also honor their roots. "We're really excited to go to new places, but I didn't want to make any music out of rebellion of the self," Guarisco says, noting that they recently dipped into a studio for a project with Cyril Neville, Johnny Vidacovich and Big Chief Monk Boudreaux. "There's no separation in the city of New Orleans when you zoom out."

Scott Murawski

After years on the jamband circuit, the veteran Max Creek frontman and Mike Gordon guitarist finds newfound fame in a post-jam world. BY MIKE GREENHAUS

TIME LOVES A HERO

Way back in 1976, we had this friend who was a very successful artist. He would throw these Narragansett Blowout parties every summer at his mansion down in Rhode Island, and we would play on the beach facing the water. People would come and camp on the property, and we would play for three days. In 1983 we said, "We can throw our own party" and held the first two Camp Creeks that year—one in Granby, Conn., and another off Route 24 in Bowdoinham, Maine. We held it up in Maine for a few years after that—we had a single stage and set up in a barn. There were obviously the big events like Woodstock and Watkins Glen and all of that, but smaller festivals were nonexistent at that time.

When I go to festivals these days, I get overwhelmed with the number of stages and how there's music from 11 a.m.–6 a.m. What I've always liked about Camp Creek is that we have only two stages—you can just turn around to watch the next show. We put a lot of thought into who the other acts are. It's a lot of our good musical friends and people that have deeper meaning to us—last year, we had Paul Barrere and Fred Tackett. I've been on the little side stage when there's a really good band playing on the main stage, and I've been on the main stage when friends have been playing on a side stage. I don't want to compete against my musical buddies. [Ed. Note: This year's Camp Creek is slated for July 8-10 in Mariaville, N.Y.]

CREEK FREAKS

My earliest memory of Mike Gordon that stands out was when Max Creek played Burlington, Vt., in the 1980s. He handed me a cassette tape and a piece of sheet music and said, "I took a recording of Max Creek's 'Emotional Railroad,' and I transcribed your guitar solo." It looked unbelievably complicated. I grew up reading music, but I don't read music for guitar and I certainly don't write music for guitar, so it was pretty cool to have somebody give me a piece of sheet music with my playing on it.

He said: "Here's the recording of my transcription. It's got Max Creek on one side and I'm playing bass on the other." I thought, "This is a person who has way too much time on their hands!" Mike was aware of Max Creek while growing up in Massachusetts and, when he went away to college, Mike actually sent his dad a recorder to tape one of our Boston shows.

INTO THE WOODS

The first project that Mike and I had together was The Drop Caps in '97 when Mike was asked to play a folk festival in Ann Arbor, Mich. And then, he approached me about his *Inside In* band in 2003. We've been writing together for the past few years. He's in Burlington, and I'm near Boston, so now we find these isolated cabins on lakes in the middle of the woods between us to work. The first time, we brought way too much gear and then, every time after that, we reduced it. We would sit around and just throw ideas out. We probably came up with 15 songs during our first five weekends and we whittled that down to eight.

Mike's an interesting guy. He wants everything to be the best it can be and to explore every possibility. That can be overwhelming. A lot of times, in preparation for these Skype writing sessions we have on Wednesdays, he'll do a bunch of work before and then just spit out all these different lyrical possibilities. There's a lot of trust. He trusts my opinion and I trust his opinion. We're always there to serve the song as opposed to serving our personal agendas.

MIKE'S SONGS

Mike's 2014 album, *Overstep*, was the culmination of us developing our process. It's been a very educational collaboration and, at this point, we can write pretty quickly. It's also very cool to have Phish play some songs that I helped write. When Phish was looking for new material, Mike and I got together and took some things that we hadn't developed—a couple of jams and ideas that seemed more Phish-oriented—and we polished three or four of them. He also brought in one of the songs that didn't make it to *Overstep*. Phish picked "555" for *Fuego*, so it's neat that Bob Ezrin produced a song I helped write and added all these horns and gospel singers.

POST-JAM ALL-STARS

[Mike Gordon's new solo band] is firing on all cylinders. The new members have such a new energy. When we auditioned Johnny Kimock for the band, it immediately clicked. He's a good kid, and we have such a great time hanging together. And Robert Walter just brings such a musical history. We had these listening parties on tour—he reminds me of Derek Trucks. Their knowledge of music is just so vast. You could spend weeks picking their brains. I'm a very rhythmic guitar player, almost close to a drummer. I really enjoy people that have a great rhythmic sense, and Robert Walter is all about that. He's viciously good.

We're trying to explore new territory—new sounds—and opening it up to see what else is out there rather than rehashing our other bands. Even though Johnny's dad is rooted in the jamband world, he hasn't had all that much exposure to it. Mike is obviously in the perfect jamband, and I've had my jamband experience. That's all well and good, but why put another band together that does the same thing?

Scott Murawski and Mike Gordon help guide their band away from their jamband roots

Frank Lanza

Vulfpeck

Slip, Stitch & Groove

Vulfpeck wants you to think that they are the hottest session band from Berlin circa 1976. The only problem is, they've never even been to Germany. "Being German is so helpful to loving American music. They love it the way Americans never could," says Jack Stratton, the group's founder. One of the best new bands to arrive on the funk scene in recent memory, Vulfpeck delivered their debut full-length *Thrill of the Arts* (Vulf Records) in 2015—a 33-minute pop-funk opus that bounces between '70s Elton John stadium-rockers ("Welcome to Vulf Records"), dirty neo-soul ("Funky Duck") and psychedelic blues ("Rango II").

Stratton (keyboards/drums), Theo Katzman (guitar/drums), Woody Goss (keyboards) and Joe Dart (bass) formed Vulfpeck at the University of Michigan in 2011. Not counting 2014's *Sleepify*—their controversial "silent album" that fans played on repeat as they went to bed, reportedly earning Vulfpeck $20,000 in Spotify royalties—the band has already recorded four EPs. The first three were entirely instrumental and the fourth, *Fugue State*, introduced vocals. *Thrill of The Arts* ups the ante by weaving in an array of guests, including Blake Mills and famed session guitarist David T. Walker (Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Jackson 5).

"I've always enjoyed the model of backing up different artists and being versatile with the front person," explains Stratton, citing The Funk Brothers and the Stax house band as primary influences in forming the project.

Vulfpeck has already garnered a lot of early comparisons to another popular quartet, Phish, mostly due to their love of improvisation, their two-set show format and their musical stunts. "I don't know how similar we sound [to Phish]," says Stratton, "but a four-piece doing 'their thing' is what we're all about, so that's where the crossover lies. I would read these [Phantasy Tour] threads and think, 'Damn, these people are going deep!' I had never seen anyone respond to our band like that, up to that point. They are very serious music fans and we totally appreciate that. Our sound is not a limited palette. It's kind of all over the place, so I can see why they are attracted to us."

The group already has their eyes set on a new record in 2016. "The new album took two weeks to record—one in LA and one in Michigan—and we tried to cram in the best of both cities, so we want to keep doing that. We're thinking a week in New Orleans and Minneapolis for the next record. I hear some good music has come out of those places." ***Jesse Lauter***

Wild Nothing

Mystery in Pseudonyms

When Jack Tatum started writing songs as Wild Nothing, it felt right to hide behind a band name. "It had a vagueness that, subconsciously, I could grow with," he says. "It's allowed me to project different feelings and intentions with a certain level of anonymity—the idea of 'nothing' is vastness as opposed to emptiness."

He's just released *Life of Pause*, the long-awaited follow-up LP to 2013's *Empty Estate* EP and recently relocated to Los Angeles from Brooklyn. "I wanted a slightly quieter life in a place where I'd still have access to music and culture," he says.

The recording process spread itself out over a much longer period this time around. "I used to worry about how to define what it is that I do," he says. "This is the first record that has broadened the scope of what I allow into my music. There are different kinds of songs on this record, but they all represent the same person, the same experience."

Tatum's sounds, which he describes as "shifting, familiar, layered, grounded, deliberate," are often influenced directly by what he's currently listening to, whether it's a pop-radio melody, David Bowie, David Byrne, Brian Eno, Roxy Music, a film composition or soul music. "Your own limitations can be integral to the creative process," he says. "I've often been limited to coming up with ideas in my own bedroom with only a handful of instruments. This shapes the sound of something, but it can also teach you where your boundaries are and where the cracks in those boundaries exist."

Wild Nothing's shows remain faithful to the quintet's records, but they also try to be as honest as possible. "There's sometimes a lot happening in these songs, and it can be tempting to use backing tracks and other tricks, but we've reached a point of realization that this should be a 'rock' group in the classic sense," he says, adding that his focus has always been more on songwriting than performing.

"I grew up in a small town in Virginia, and it was rare that musicians I liked would come through the area, so my relationship has always been much stronger with records," Tatum adds.

Looking ahead, he'll support *Life of Pause* on the road for much of 2016, which will likely "be my life, which is good. It's been a while. I need that ebb and flow.

"My knowledge and taste was never really dependent on my friends or environment," Tatum explains. "In that sense, I've always been a bit of a musical loner. You can be anywhere and find yourself drawn to things from all over the world." ***Amy Jacques***

American Babies

An Epic Battle Between Light & Dark

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"I WANTED IT TO BE A COMBINATION of weird electronic music and my Grateful Dead roots," Tom Hamilton explains of the latest studio release from his American Babies project. "The goal was to make an album that sounds like Jerry Garcia was in Stereolab." Such an aspiration reflects the span of Hamilton's career, which began with the indie-electronic band Brothers Past and, lately, has found him revisiting the Dead material he enjoyed during his formative years, while performing in Joe Russo's Almost Dead and Billy & The Kids.

Comedian Robin Williams' suicide provided the impetus for Hamilton's new record, *An Epic Battle Between Light & Dark,* which he wrote and recorded with Peter Tramo at Philadelphia's Lorelei Studio. "As somebody who has struggled with depression my whole life, to see somebody like that throw in the towel was a hard thing to deal with," Hamilton explains. "It became the catalyst for starting the conversation about the record's subject matter."

SYNTH DRIVER

"Synth Driver" was the first song we finished where, when we listened to the playback, we thought, "Holy shit, I think we found our sonic signature. I think we found the tonal palette of the record." By this point, we probably had seven other tunes in various degrees of completion but, once we got through this one, we said, "This is where we want to go," and we started combing through the other tunes to make sure they fit with what we were doing.

It's a great welcoming track—it draws you in. I like the beginning of the song, the way it starts with the pedal steel and the synthesizers, and how that drumbeat just creeps in on you—"Let's see what's going to happen." Lyrically, it was the last song that we wrote because we didn't have the idea completely fleshed out yet as far as what we were going to say and how we were going to say it. We finished "Synth Driver," went through the rest of the record and, when we finished, I circled back around and wrote the lyrics.

OH DARLING, MY DARLING

"Oh Darling, My Darling" was the second song we finished. The reason those are the first two tunes on the album is because, after we finished "Synth Driver," I came home, and while I was just lying around, the chords for the opening bit came into my brain. I ran over to my mini recorder and I dropped it down really quickly. It made complete sense—this is the continuation of "Synth Driver," this is the beginning of chasing it down the rabbit hole.

"Oh Darling, My Darling," lyrically, is a play off of "Oh Captain! My Captain!" from that Robins Williams picture [*Dead Poets Society*]. When I get into those really dark places, what works for me is to just let it happen. If I feel the anxiety is on its way, fighting it is like quicksand. I strap in and say, "Look, it's not going to kill you. It's going to suck, but put on your seatbelt and the ride will be over soon." So that's where the song is lyrically—"Oh darling, my darling, let the darkness in, live for the light of another day."

ALONE IN THE HOUSE

One thing that really got me thinking about mental illness is that I had a relationship that didn't go very well about a year and a half ago. It was a really intense relationship. My ex-girlfriend had a lot of problems, and I was there for her—I was right there on the frontline with her. Then, one day, I came home from the road and she was gone—no note, all of her stuff

just gone. Looking back, she was definitely doing me a favor—I didn't have to deal with the extra baggage that came with her life—but it didn't suck any less. It was a rough situation, and I was alone in the house.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE?

Since I've crossed over into my 30s, I have been living this existential crisis of trying to accept my mortality, which I just can't wrap my head around. I talk to people about it all the time, and it's weird how many people are so blasé about it. I have a very hard time accepting and comprehending the idea of not existing anymore. It's not something that I am able to process, necessarily.

I was 35 when I wrote this song. It's a weird fucking age. I'm nothing—I'm not young, I'm not old—no one is really impressed with anything at that point. I have an older brother, who just turned 40, and he's got a home, a wife and kids. And I have a younger sister who is 19, and she might as well be a kitten—throw some yarn in front of her and she's occupied. It's weird being in the middle—middle of my family, middle of my lifetime, middle of my career. That's where that song comes from lyrically and emotionally.

FEVER DREAMS

"Fever Dreams" was as important as "Synth Driver" was for the direction of the record because I don't like making records that sound the same. I don't need to hear the same song 12 times—I try to have an arc, like a movie. There should be a storyline—not only lyrically, but also sonically. I want there to be some kind of difference and bend in the sound. "Synth Driver" has more of an electronic, European vibe, whereas "Fever Dreams" felt more North American—more indie rock, more alt-country. Musically, when we were finished, it was like, "This is the other sonic side of the rainbow here. We have the real European sexy sound with "Synth Driver" and "Oh Darling" and now this other stopping point, "Fever Dreams."

Lyrically, it's just that point of where you are so down that you are hallucinating. You are having fever dreams—trying to wrap your head around the lowest points. It's a little disassociated and weird, and that is what the first part of the tune is—the disassociation and the shit that doesn't make a lot of sense. Then when it breaks down and goes into the "Fever Dreams" thing, you snap out of it for a second and realize what is going on.

A lot of people are self-destructive when they are down—they'll go out and party harder or do drugs or be promiscuous or whatever they do to make themselves feel alive. It is not necessarily autobiographical but, one time, I did start smoking again because I was depressed, which was a bad idea. You do stupid shit because you think it means something even though it doesn't—the person who goes out and gets that tattoo after a bad breakup or starts smoking. Nobody cares that you're doing this stuff except yourself. Fucking get it together.

NOT IN A MILLION YEARS

I had written the phrase "Not in a Million Years" down on my phone and I always knew I wanted it to be a song title. So when we were putting together this record, I poured over my notes and I said, "This totally makes sense to me to be a song title on this record." We were starting to piece together the album and, sonically, we had the two ends—the arc I was talking about. All the way on the left is "Synth Driver" and all the way on the right is the title track and, at the peak of the arc—in the middle—was "Fever Dreams." I needed something to bring us back and bring the arc down toward the title track—something to bridge "Fever Dreams" and "Bring It in Close." I didn't know what it was going to be.

Pete had this machine—a little box. It's a cube that is about 8-inches big that they sell in India to people practicing the sitar. You can tune the drone to whatever note you want it to be and you can change the voicing. He said, "I just dug this thing up—see what you can do with it." We'd had a lot of long days and nights, so he basically threw this thing at me and then went and took a nap on the couch. While he was napping, I took this machine and built the track that turned into "Not in a Million Years." The song feels like anxiety—the uneasiness. I have a lot of nervous tics. My fingers move a lot and my feet keep time with things that don't exist. I am an anxious individual, and I wanted to convey that to bridge "Fever Dreams" and the next song. "Fever Dreams" is the song that says, "I am going to do something that is not the smartest move," and then there is that anxiety that brings us to the next track.

BRING IT IN CLOSE

I have had the skeleton of this song for maybe five years. A friend of mine was a heroin addict, and she couldn't keep it together. Every time she would get clean, it was just a matter of time before a relapse happened. She was a younger kid, a really nice, smart person from the suburbs, who grew up with every opportunity but, for some reason, still ended up in the ghettos of North Philly buying dope. That's what the beginning

of the song alludes to—the person that wanted to go do something stupid and found themselves back in that place, in the shadows, doing the thing they think they should be doing but would never do in front of anyone they know.

I was sitting on this thing forever and, when we were still in the writing phase, I played it for Pete who said, "I really love the vibe, musically." The opening lyric was the only line I had for the song. I looked at it within the context of the record and it made a lot of sense, so I was able to quickly finish the lyrics and write out that whole end bit. It is one of my favorite songs to play off this record.

AN EPIC BATTLE BETWEEN LIGHT & DARK

Pete and I both have folders full of bullshit things that we never completed. He was going through his, and he said, "You'll never believe the song I found yesterday; I don't even fucking remember writing it."

He had a dark period a little while back and would record things that he wouldn't remember. So we opened it up and I thought the groove was so fucking cool. I said, "Is this fair game? Can we use this?" He said, "Absolutely." So we took the elements out of it that we liked—a lot of the stuff is from the original demo, including the strings and the keyboards. Then I replayed the drums and added a bunch of guitars and wrote lyrics over it.

It felt cinematic. I travel a lot, and I'm always in hotels and motels by myself, sitting and thinking. When I created the music, it took me right to that place of what happens in the middle of a tour when that darkness creeps in, and I ask myself, "What do I do?" That's where the whole end bit, lyrically, comes from. As far as I know, this is the only life I've got. I might not always think it's fair or the way I want it, but it's still pretty fucking good, and if you want to be happy, you have to work for it. You have to claw for every single fucking inch of peace and happiness. That's the thing, at the end of the day, that keeps me from spiraling into the abyss—the idea that if I work hard, I will find those little moments of happiness. That's what keeps me going.

Elliott Landy

BY ROB SLATER

"I WAS ALWAYS a photographer first," Elliott Landy says as he surveys his new photo book on the subject most synonymous with his storied career, *The Band Photographs: 1968–1969*. "The purity, the composition, the background, the balance—that's what was most important. No matter what a picture showed, if the image wasn't beautiful, I had to put it aside."

Perhaps "beautiful" is the best way to describe Landy's 160-page journey through his time with Robbie Robertson, Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson and Richard Manuel during their early years as The Band. Landy captured the innocent beauty of the members as they crafted their first two masterpieces, *Music from Big Pink* and *The Band*, after years of backing the likes of Ronnie Hawkins and Bob Dylan. In fact, Landy unintentionally even helped give The Band their name.

Teaming with *Relix* contributor Rachel Dobken, Landy sifted through roughly a thousand photos of The Band—shot everywhere from their refuge in Woodstock, N.Y., to Sammy Davis Jr.'s house in West Hollywood, where they assembled "Rag Mama Rag," "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" and "Up on Cripple Creek" for their second, self-titled record. They also spliced in candid shots of the five musicians at home during a time when their decidedly blue-collar, Americana spirit and Civil-War-like wardrobes stood in sharp contrast to the psychedelic '60s.

Landy remembers the day he stumbled on the perfect place to shoot *Music from Big Pink*'s now iconic cover, spotting the location while gazing outside at the landscape of the house Helm and Danko rented for the sessions. "We looked around and we looked around and drove here and drove there and didn't see anything. And then I was sitting in their living room, and I looked out the window and there it was."

In the studio, Landy describes the group as "workmanlike," constantly pushing to get their songs right. "I was always careful not to interfere or interrupt. I was considerate, in other words, and that's why I got to do so many of these. A lot of good pictures happened," he says, recounting observing The Band during a time that he describes as a "harmonious human experience."

"My goal was to share the beauty and the harmony of those moments that I spent with them that really reflected what their music was about and also reflected how they got along with each other in those days," he says. "These five people created some very great art that's made a lot of people happy over the years, and I felt that I wanted to share that."

THE BAND PORTRAIT
Rick Danko's Uncle's Farm, Canada, 1968

EL: That was the first time I photographed them. I went up to Canada, to Rick's uncle's farm, and they had all their relatives there to do a family portrait. They wanted to pay homage to their families, in the '60s, when [most of us] were trying to break away from tradition and the historical behavioral patterns of previous generations. A lot of people were rejecting their parents totally and saying: "I don't want to live the life my parents are living. I want to be free. I want to express myself. And I want to live by my own self-expression."

That translated, at first, to the rejection of one's family and parents. The Band said: "That's not right. These people worked very hard for us. They cared for us, they brought us up, they educated us. We want to thank them and be respectful of our families and not reject them."

RICHARD MANUEL, ROBBIE ROBERTSON AND RICK DANKO
West Hollywood Hills, Calif., 1969

EL: I went out to California for about two weeks. It was a very casual situation. The property they rented had a pool house that they made into a studio, and then they had a big house with deluxe bathrooms that they were all staying in with their families. Their wives and Robbie's mother were there. This was in the living room one night after dinner.
RD: Richard, Robbie and Rick are so perfectly framed by anonymous legs and objects, circa 1969—their body language and the light that shapes their faces and figures. It's just one of many shots that indicate Elliott's ability to capture these men in their most "real" states—arms folded, clothes wrinkled, hair messy.

THE BAND FACING THE WATER
West Saugerties, N.Y., 1968

EL: That was the first picture of them that was published and it was used on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. It was taken in the first photo session when I went up there, and they wanted a picture for the album, just the five of them.

Robbie told me that they weren't sure what name to use or if they even wanted a name because, once you had a name, you could be categorized and classified, and you're locked into doing a certain kind of music. And they wanted to be free of the old genres of music. They didn't want to be locked in people's minds. They were even questioning having a name at all.

The reason that they started to be called The Band was because, under the picture, it says "The Band." It was really an unintentional name because they didn't want to focus on themselves and their personalities. They only wanted to focus on their music. That picture is exactly what they described—these five guys who just played music at that time and didn't get into their personalities or worry about being stars.

RICK DANKO *Woodstock, N.Y., 1969*

EL: Infrared film was created by the U.S. military for aerial-light photography to see through mist and haze from up high, and then, in the late '60s, we began using it to get these crazy colors. I experimented with it a bit, and that was one of the good pictures that came out. You never knew what it was going to look like because the film was sensitive to infrared light and invisible light. *[This photo was taken with Infrared Kodak Film.]*

BIG PINK ALBUM SHOOT

Levon and Rick's House, Woodstock, N.Y., 1969

EL: When the first two [sessions didn't result] in what they wanted, I realized I had to figure this out and think about it. By that time, I had come to know them, and they were very rooted, very grounded people. They came from rural backgrounds, and they were connected to the earth. They were real.

They weren't psychedelic, and they took pride in not being psychedelic. They were just very folksy, homey people. They respected everyone, whether they were in a restaurant being served food or in a deli. They sincerely treated them as nicely as they would [treat] an electric company executive. That's kind of an old-time way of being. There wasn't such a separation by status among people—everybody was kind of in the same boat.

In the 1860s and '70s, everyone paid attention to the photographer. They got dressed up. It was an important occasion, unlike in the casual 1960s, and I really liked that. They took a picture with exposure, which meant that everybody had to stand still, so I took it at a very slow exposure, and I said, "Stand still because it's a long exposure, and I don't want you to get blurred." I did a lot of technical mastery, as well as aesthetic mastery, to get that picture.

THE BAND IN THE STUDIO

West Hollywood Hills, Calif., 1969

EL: They were really working to get it right. When I photograph people, I don't necessarily interact with them. I try to stay out of what they're doing and just be a fly on the wall, rather than someone that creates the picture. I take the picture that already exists.

RD: Some of my favorite photographs in the book are the studio images. That's because of what you are witnessing here—the energetic sense of chemistry, both musically and personally, that The Band possessed so perfectly.

ROBBIE ROBERTSON AND LEVON HELM

Chestnut Hill Road, Woodstock, N.Y., 1969

EL: Rick had gotten married to a Woodstocker named Grace and that was the home that they bought. They created a rehearsal studio downstairs in the basement where a lot of photographs of The Band were taken. And this was one of the rooms upstairs used for playing music.

RD: When the time came to cut images, we decided to keep both of these, and I'm so glad we did. There's something to be said about how Elliott captured this relationship in particular—the way that Levon looks as Robbie plays, then Robbie looks at Levon. All of these little nuances are what really interested me—Levon's rapidly tapping foot. It's what I knew would set the book apart.

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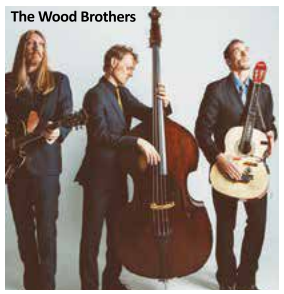
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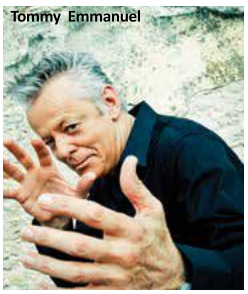
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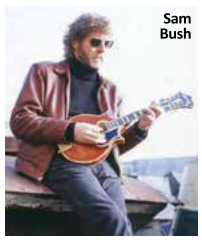
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Steep Canyon Rangers

Marty Balin

The Summer of Love's chief romantic celebrates a half-century of *Good Memories* with Jefferson Airplane BY MIKE GREENHAUS

Marty Balin: Jefferson Airplane's original voice

MARTIN BALIN has every right to claim the title of the Summer of Love's founding father. Along with guitarist Paul Kantner, he formed Jefferson Airplane in 1965 as the house band for The Matrix, a San Francisco club he co-owned and oversaw, and served as the band's co-lead singer and romantic ambassador throughout their half-decade sonic metamorphosis. So it's only fitting that the 74-year-old Ohio native, and current San Francisco and North Florida resident, marked the Airplane's golden anniversary with both a career retrospective and a collection of new love songs.

"The new songs are basically the music I've been writing and adding to my live show over the last two years," Balin says in January, while preparing for a few dates with his tight, limber acoustic trio. "Every time I write a new song, I add it to the show—working them up live still makes a huge difference. Once I get going, I can't stop—sometimes our sets will last for three hours. With a trio, it's easy: 'Follow me, guys!'"

The Greatest Love arrived just before Valentine's Day, only two months after Balin dropped another release, *Good Memories*—a freshly recorded, acoustic-driven, double-disc survey of Balin's Jefferson Airplane and Jefferson Starship singles and album cuts like "It's No Secret," "Blues from an Airplane" and "Hearts." Doubling as something of an Airplane family primer, *Good Memories* follows the band's evolution from their folk roots to their psychedelic '60s peak and groovy '70s singles like "Miracles" and "Runaway," which sound refreshingly haunting when stripped of their studio gloss.

"I was recording *The Greatest Love* but doing some of these old Airplane songs live with my band," says Balin, who remained in the Starship orbit through the late-'70s hit-making days, despite his reluctance to tour. He also continued to appear with Kantner's version of the group into the 21st century. "Somebody thought it would be a cool idea to celebrate Jefferson Airplane's 50th anniversary last year by putting those oldies, but goodies, on an album. So in the midst of recording the new album, we knocked out some of the ones that we do live in the show, and they came together pretty quick and easy."

Though Jefferson Airplane's 50th passed without a highly anticipated reunion—Grace Slick has consistently insisted that she's too old to perform rock music—Balin, who remained largely neutral during latter-day fractional spats between band members, stirred the rumor mill when he joined Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady for a few Airplane classics at New York's Beacon Theatre on the eve of the group's anniversary in late 2014. He's also channeled the original Airplane's tight focus on artistically minded songwriting and dynamic musicianship with his trio and has gradually started splicing his concerts with more catalog songs.

"We just started doing them as a trip at the rehearsals, and then we started using them in the live shows and noticed that they went over pretty good," he says of the trio's setlists, which now dig much deeper than anthems like "Volunteers." "I kept them in the mix." And as he inches toward the Summer of Love's own 50-year milestone in just over a year, Balin's happy to return to the folk stories and heartfelt ballads that originally inspired him to start a band.

"I'm doing the same thing that I've always done. I love to sing; I go out and sing for people and people come out to hear me and I think it's great. As long as I can keep doing that, I'm a happy man."

Sadly, *Good Memories* took on new significance when Kantner and Signe Anderson—the Airplane's first female voice—both passed away, eerily, on January 28.

"He and I opened new worlds," Balin said of Kanter in a statement. "He was the first guy I picked for the band, and he was the first guy who taught me how to roll a joint. And although I know he liked to play the devil's advocate, I am sure he has earned his wings now." He also paid tribute to Anderson in a heartfelt message: "One sweet Lady has passed on. I imagine that she and Paul woke up in heaven and said, 'Hey, what are you doing here? Let's start a band,' and no sooner than that [deceased Airplane drummer] Spencer Dryden was there joining in!"

In recent years, you've woven Jefferson Airplane and Starship songs into your solo sets with increased regularity. What sparked your interest in this material again?

Basically, it was my guitar player, Chuck Morrongiello, who got me interested in doing them again. He'd play me songs out of Bill Graham's vaults or something—from all these shows that we did. I didn't know they were recorded. I would say, "Oh, yeah. I remember that one," and he'd say, "Well, let's do it."

People were getting off during the live show because they hadn't heard these old songs for ages. It was fun. When we decided to make the record, we did the songs that we were already doing live with the band.

You coupled your Airplane tribute with a collection of new love songs with your trio. What were your initial goals for that project?

The trio's just me, Charlie and an upright bass player named Lloyd Goldstein, who we call Goldie. We all live around here, hang out together and just started playing. Then we started doing these little shows and took it from there. I'm always writing and had all of these new songs building up.

I'm not with Jefferson Starship anymore, though they still use me in their ads. I have all of these songs, and now I don't have to wait for somebody to change guitars or have an instrumental break in every song, then pass it around to all of the singers. It's like a circus. I'm not into that.

People want to hear me sing, and now that's what I'm doing; I'm just singing. The whole night is me—and if you dig it, cool. And I'm having fun. I move wherever I want, from one song I want to another. There aren't any egos and [we are free from] people's problems—waiting for somebody to light a cigarette, have a drink or change guitars and organize their music. Let's get to the music, man. That's what I'm doing—just flying along.

I enjoy the acoustic approach of just me and two guys. It's what you would do if you were just recording and laying down the basic tracks. So we decided to put these new songs on an album and we laid down these fresh ideas, new inspirations. I could have brought in all kinds of musicians, but I wanted to keep it live—just really simple and bare bones. The song is the essence here. I don't have any instrumental breaks. I don't have all these interludes or the psychedelic tripping from some of those big songs. We just basically pared it down to the song.

Though Grace Slick has made it clear she isn't interested in performing again, you sparked a reunion frenzy by joining Hot Tuna at the Beacon in late 2014. What was the impetus for that collaboration?

It was Jack Casady's birthday and they invited me to come sing a few songs. I was playing up there in New York, too, so we went over there and we joined in with them and played and it was kind of fun. Jorma's got all of his other guys onstage, so it's a big scene, big sound. I had played at Jorma's ranch before that and Jorma and Jack got up and played with me there, but we hadn't played before that for a while.

Balin during his tenure on Trove Records in the '90s

You started in the 1960s folk scene and, in many ways, you've returned to that more stripped-down, song-driven approach with your trio.

Yeah, and maybe I'll build up demand, too, and be able to add cool instruments. That would be kind of fun. You can look at kids like Ed Sheeran and people like that who just get up by themselves. It seems to me like that approach still works today. If it's good enough for him, then I figure it's good enough for me.

I still like listening to the old stuff, but I hear new music all the time. My little daughter will play music on the computer and I'll say, "What is that? That's cool, play that song again." Then I hear stuff all the time on the radio and I try to write it down. There's a lot of stuff happening that's really nice, especially in Canada or Europe, actually. It all comes down to good songs, good singers, good sounds.

Now that Jefferson Airplane has passed the 50-year mark, how would you describe the band's true legacy?

We were the first band out of the San Francisco hippie scene. I remember telling these record companies: "Oh, there are all these other guys up there playing, and there's this girl Janis Joplin, and there are people up there called the Dead." We would talk about all of this stuff, and all they wanted was this band called the Airplane. So we were the ones from that scene who broke through and got the record companies interested in signing these bands from Frisco.

Hüsker Dü's frontman enters his golden years—older, wiser and just as chaotic

BY RYAN REED

Bob Mould's Third Wind

"I'M GETTING OLDER," SAYS ROCK legend Bob Mould, exhaling a quiet laugh. But at 55, the former Hüsker Dü/Sugar mastermind is aging with creative verve, deep into his third essential era as a singer-songwriter. *Patch the Sky*, Mould's radiant 12th solo LP, is his third in four years, extending one of the most prolific streaks in his three-and-a-half-decade career.

His road toward resurgence has been filled with fascinating detours. Following the 1988 collapse of iconic alt-punk act Hüsker Dü, Mould found a second wind with underrated alt-rock act Sugar. But his new millennium résumé has been harder to pin down: dalliances with electronica (LoudBomb's 2002 release *Modulate*) and DJ material (Blowoff) alongside bursts of his trademark heavy, hooky rock. Mould has spent the past couple of decades cashing in on his critical cache, recording whatever style of music he damn well pleases, while redefining his parameters as a songwriter. But as musical trends cycle, with Hüsker Dü and Sugar becoming touchstones for a new crop of rock songwriters, Mould has built unexpected momentum.

The dam broke in 2011. One important step came by glancing backward and retracing his life and career in the acclaimed autobiography he co-authored, *See a Little Light: The Trail of Rage and Melody*. Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl also worked admirably to raise Mould's profile throughout the year, recruiting him to record guitar and backing vocals on a Foos track, covering Hüsker Dü's "Never Talking to You Again" as part of a Record Store Day covers LP, and inviting his idol to open tour dates with DJ sets. During some arena shows, Mould even relished the jolt of joining the band onstage.

"I was a huge fan of Hüsker Dü," Grohl told *Mojo*. "Their album *Zen Arcade* is one of the most underrated American rock-and-roll records of all time. And only recently did I realize how much I've ripped Bob off for the last 16 years! I met him for the first time last summer and said, 'You know, I'd be nowhere and nobody without your music, right?' And he very politely nodded and said, 'I know.'"

Mould capped off that incredible run, appropriately, in the center spotlight, as Grohl and other notable devotees (including Ryan Adams, The Hold Steady's Craig Finn and Spoon's Britt Daniel) united to celebrate his influence that November at a Los Angeles tribute concert. After spending decades as a revered elder statesman, Mould was operating on a grander stage.

Recruiting bassist Jason Narducy (Split Single, Verbow) and drummer Jon Wurster (The Mountain Goats, Superchunk), Mould recorded two slabs of heavy, bare-bones rock: 2012's *Silver Age* and 2014's *Beauty & Ruin*, a formidable one-two punch that earned his fondest reviews in years.

"We're having a great run, there's no doubt about it," Mould says. "A lot of things conspired at once, moved to the same spot at once—the autobiography, the stuff with Foo Fighters. Jon and Jason and I had toured together in '08 and '09, and I think my visibility was pretty low at that time, so people didn't get to see those tours where we were learning the additional current language. Clearly, the three of us know the old language—Hüsker, Sugar, that stuff—real well, but how to build on it? I think with *Silver Age* and *Beauty & Ruin*, it was pretty clear I'd found a way to write to that strength."

EVEN WITH HIS CAREER AT A NEW peak, Mould's personal life was in disarray—though he chooses to keep quiet on the details. "It was pretty fucked up," he says, referencing a particularly difficult stretch in 2014. "I didn't really want to be around people at all. I felt like people close to me could verify that I was acting strange and lashing out. I had a lot of personal setbacks as I was out touring *Beauty & Ruin*. I've had a lot of loss in my life—people passing, people getting sick, people leaving. That's life, but it really fucks with your head, and you're not sure what's what. I know myself well enough to know that's a good time to get out of life—get out of the way and go home, stay away from people so I don't do any more damage."

Attempting to heal "physically and spiritually and emotionally," he sequestered himself from friends and family in his San Francisco home, pouring his emotional trauma into songs over a seven-month writing span. "Life goes on, work goes on," he says. "But when work is done and I go home, I just sort of sit with myself. And that's what the process is, that's what this songwriting thing is. It's not like being an architect where the plans for the kitchen are due next week so the contractor can start. It's sitting every day with my thoughts, with my tools, and making music. That's the therapy of it, I guess, and that's the way I get to the core of it.

"I think we all have those moments where a lot of unfortunate things happen to people in a close stretch of time. It's nothing special. We all go through it, and that's how I deal with it: I get out of traffic and write music."

Both a musical and literal nomad, Mould moved from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco in 2009, and the city's unique aura informed some of his material around that time. But the isolated writing process of *Patch the Sky* yielded more intimate results, mainly reflecting the troubled contours of his own psyche. "With *Patch the Sky*, my search would have yielded these results pretty much anywhere. I think that speaks to literally how isolated I was when I was working on the record. From the beginning of writing the record to now, they've installed a new locker room at my gym. That's about all I know."

Writing almost every day, Mould wound up with 50 fully formed musical ideas and a pile of loose words and lyrical concepts. He initially considered crafting a fast, hard-hitting punk LP, inspired by a famously vehement *Late Show* performance, where the trio's din literally shook dust from the rafters. ("Nice drums, by the way," deadpanned then-host David Letterman.) But the puzzle pieces slowly merged into place, with Mould pairing bleak (or in the case of epic sing-along "The End of Things," apocalyptic) lyrics with an array of mostly sunny sonic styles.

That light-dark contrast runs throughout his songbook, dating back to his time with Hüsker Dü. But he's sharpened that skill over the years, using classic pop tricks to lure in listeners who might otherwise grimace at the heavy subject matter.

"They're pretty simplistic and easy to remember," he says of his melodies, high-

lighting the surging chorus of "Hold On," an outlier in the writing process that germinated in late 2013 as a "slow, pounding acoustic" track. "I've always been a big fan of the classic pop hook. Because once you get the hook stuck in their head, they'll listen over and over, and eventually, the words get in. That's always been the contrast for me: the beauty of the hook and sometimes the heaviness of the words. That's always been a real foundation of my work."

But as much as Mould loves the intricacies of rock songcraft, he finds the process more difficult in an era of pervasive plagiarism accusations—where even vague melodic similarities can result in a lawsuit.

"I always have that fear. I'll write a song, and I'll think it sounds so familiar, like, 'Oh, my god, did I lift this from somewhere?'" he says. "That's no way to live! And if the music business is going to act like this in its last dying breaths, come on... Just fucking tell stories. It's a dangerous situation with this stuff. [The 2015 Marvin Gaye/Robin Thicke case] is the one I was really upset about. [Those songs] technically have nothing to do with each other besides a cowbell and *maybe* a groove. Those early Prince records would be in grave danger if you applied that to everybody—this idea of copping a feel. No! Back off!"

MOULD'S IN A strange position these days. Hüsker followers have blown up his distinctive approach for an arena setting, while Mould himself remains far from a household name. *Patch the Sky* centerpiece "You Say You," with its snarling vocal lines, inverted chord shapes and wall-of-guitars production, recalls the bombast of Foo Fighters classic "Everlong"—and then you realize that it just sounds like trademark Mould.

Patch the Sky is filled with such moments of intense clarity, like the chugging "Voices in My Head" and the climactic "Monument," which finds Mould singing about a crumbling world held in place by music. ("Walls of sound keep the sky from falling down.") "It's a sort of a commemoration of living, a commemoration of death," he says. "And some people argue that monuments are more a monument to the fabricator than the subject. That line is such an easy one—it literally is what it says. That din that I make, those voices in my head that just keep going and going. Then, at the end of the record, that's how it ends."

Mould is a songwriter in the old-fashioned sense, crafting classic pop chord changes that deliver what he calls "the chemical chorus"—but the skills of Wurster and Narducy have forced him to step up his game. They've formed the perfect power trio, both onstage and in the studio, but Mould's realistic that this ideal set-up might not be permanent. "These three records really feel like a package," he says. "Both of those guys are so gifted and so in-demand—not only with their own stuff, but they also work on a lot of different projects. I'm always grateful we get time to play together. We travel well together. We know how to give each other the right amount of space. We have the right amount of closeness. It's incredible.

"I've worked in situations before, like in Hüsker, where healthy competition can yield amazing results. That was in my twenties, when I had a lot of fight in me and a lot of chaos. And you hear that in those records. I can't do that magic again because I'm not 20! I've found this other way to build a band and give everybody equal room to shine, but it's sort of a singular notion and a collective presentation. Music isn't like sports so much, but it really is about your strategy, and when you find something that works, you try to take care of it and take it as far as you can."

Unlike most rock gods, who either wither into irrelevance or peter out with awkward reinventions, Mould's only grown tougher—and wiser—as a songwriter over the years. Moshing to the ramped-up riffs of an anthem like "Losing Time," it's easy to forget the man's mortal, let alone in his fifties.

"The touring gets a little harder each time," he admits. "My voice has a lot of miles. I have a lot of holes punched on my screaming card. It's a reality, you know? Physically, we all do a fuck-lot, literally training like we're training for baseball or football season. People are out running miles a day, lifting weights, doing yoga. I'm not as young as I used to be, and I don't want it to break down all the time. All that's going on as far as, 'Is this it?' You never know. I don't know. We love doing this, but it's gotta look and sound right. I don't want it to look bad, and I don't want it to fall apart."

One thing he's confident about is that, despite a recent rebranding of the band's online merch store, he's not interested in the cheap nostalgia of a Hüsker Dü reunion.

"I totally get it," he says. "But I don't want a Smiths reunion. Why would you push people who have clearly moved on and have their own lives back into something they don't want to do together? It's like, 'Remember you dated that girl for six years and then broke her heart? Well, here she is again. And for my benefit, I want to see you all make out.' People don't do that in real life. I've got the best band in the world right now. No offense to Hüsker Dü—that was the best band in the world when I was there. It's like with cities: With New York City, I go, 'Fuckin' New York City—it was the best when I fuckin' lived there. Now it's just a bunch of Starbucks.' That's what we do as people—it was always best when we were there."

Mould has no idea what comes next, but he's content with the unexpected. It liberates him. "I think sometimes you can do too much of the same thing over and over, and you're not taking yourself to a new place," he says. "These are the battles. These are great battles to have."

"Every record I have, the ideal is to be able to look back on them and know that I came close to capturing where I was at that time." **M. WARD**

M. Ward turns in a set of inspired, multi-seasonal indie folk with the help of some famous friends

BY MATT INMAN

HAPPY WHEN IT RAINS

MATTHEW WARD, BETTER KNOWN BY his abbreviated forename "M.," isn't used to this weather. It's an unseasonably warm December day in New York City, and the small ice skating rink outside his swanky Manhattan hotel is slowly turning into more of a very cold wading pool. Ward steps out from under the café's speaker for a more secluded corner where someone delivers a platter of assorted snacks. Congenially, and with the unmistakable air of ease that is so evident in both his music and his presence, Ward offers to share some of "whatever he just put down."

The weather that Ward *is* accustomed to may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it suits him just fine. For the last decade and a half, Ward has spent most of his time in Portland, Ore., and has long since learned to embrace the constant drizzle. As he freely admits, in the Northwest, rainy days aren't just an inconvenience—they're a way of life.

"Living in a place that has three seasons of rain is a challenge," Ward says. "But it's not without its solutions. It's the perfect environment for making music and recording."

Ward's newest album, which came out in early March, is a tribute to those wet months. *More Rain* begins with the title track, which features an ambient drone and lightly whistling wind, giving the impression that the listener is peering into the mouth of a gaping cave, an almost ominous feeling that gives way to the more comforting soundtrack of soft rain and what sounds like gently tinkling wind bells. This isn't the sound of a looming storm; this is the soothing consistency of a gray sky that makes it acceptable to stay inside and listen to an album like *More Rain*, taking it easy by a radiating heater like the one pictured on its cover.

"It seemed like a good backdrop for the record because it's a very true backdrop for all of the recording and all of the writing," Ward explains, referring to his Portland surroundings. "Every record I have, the ideal is to be able to look back on them and know that I came close to capturing where I was at that time."

If he accomplishes his goal, then each album is a captured image of where he was both physically and mentally—another entry in an ongoing diary or scrapbook that Ward views as "almost like a photograph or a little movie."

But he didn't necessarily write all of these songs recently. While he penned some of them in the interim since his last solo effort, 2012's *A Wasteland Companion*, Ward claims that half of the tunes are 10–20 years old. "I'm always rewriting old songs that I've never felt were finished," he explains. "Every record I've made has a combination of old and new. I never really wanted to make a record where it's just the songs that I wrote over the last couple of weeks or months or something. It just doesn't sound very interesting to me."

It's one of the signifiers that you're listening to an M. Ward track. Besides his instantly recognizable breathy vocal delivery, Ward's music has a timeless quality that always seems to combine nostalgia and innovation, a tribute to the experienced producer's meticulous work in the studio and his willingness to incorporate old tunes. "I can just help myself," Ward admits, "from [picking back up] whatever I've put down."

In fact, the plan that Ward originally had for this album—for it to be a DIY doo-wop record with his own voice layered again and again on top of itself—would have made it his most innovatively nostalgic effort to date. The resulting influence that idea had on these tracks may have accomplished that feat anyway. "There's definitely new experiments for me [on this album]," he says. "This one has the most vocal layering, and I tried to make some more challenging arrangements. That's how the record started."

As to why an experimental, doo-wop-inspired album appealed to him, Ward offers an explanation that seems to pretty much sum up his ethos and reflect how his career has panned out thus far: "It sounded like fun to me," he says. "So that's what I did."

AS WITH MOST PROJECTS, *MORE RAIN* did not end up being the record that Ward had envisioned at the outset, but the influence is apparent on tracks like "Time Won't Wait," whose verses feature an underlying percussive vocal line from Ward. The song also employs Neko Case—who appeared on Ward's 2006 album *Post-War*—for tight harmonies in the chorus, a subtle-but-memorable cameo in an album chock full of them. k.d. lang accompanies Ward on the closest thing to a straight-up doo-wop tune on the album, "Little Baby"—a lilting ode to the innocence of youth. Ward says that he met lang, who is also currently based in Portland, through mutual friend, director Gus Van Sant.

"I've been a fan of her voice for a very long time, but we've never worked together until [now]," Ward says. Having lang help out on the song allowed him to dig deeper into the doo-wop realm, drawing on her vocal knowledge and experience to recreate the classic genre in his own established style. "She's just an incredible mind—an incredible voice—when it comes to all things music. She's a vocal genius. She brought in some really amazing layers that only she can do. It was a pleasure to work with her."

Since he brought in singers of Case and lang's caliber, it might seem a bit odd that Ward relegated them to backing vocals but, in reality, those two songs wouldn't be the same without those specific voices. "You can't imitate what great singers bring to a song," Ward says. Case and lang's contributions make for some of the best musical textures on the album, which is the result of experienced voices knowing when to shine and when to mix discreetly with Ward's.

After all, it is Ward's name on the cover—although to call *More Rain* a record by "M. Ward & Friends" wouldn't be totally out of line. Besides Case and lang, the album features several guest instrumentalists, including R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck and bassist Joey Spampinato of NRBQ, which Ward calls one of his "all-time favorite bands."

Although he has worked with Spampinato in the past, this was Ward's first experience in the studio with Buck, for whom his admiration is evident. "He needs no introduction—he's Peter Buck," Ward says. "He's written some of the greatest songs ever. He's just a great guitar

Continued on Page 77

A new novel looks back at a notorious incident during Grateful Dead tour in the 1980s

BY DEAN BUDNICK

MIGHT AS WELL: AN EXCERPT

In late March, Los Angeles-based publishing house Rare Bird Books will issue Might As Well, *the debut novel by* Relix *editor-in-chief Dean Budnick. The book revisits the East Coast Grateful Dead scene and, in particular, a show at the Brendan Byrne Arena—later known as the Izod Center—in East Rutherford, N.J., where a Deadhead named Adam Katz was killed in a manner that remains an unsolved murder mystery.*

"I was at that show on Oct. 14, 1989, and while I had no personal knowledge of what took place, that evening still resonates with me for many reasons," Budnick explains. "I also think that, beyond the music, when one considers the scope of people who attended Grateful Dead shows back then, it was a fascinating moment of social and cultural history. I tried to capture all that in *Might As Well*, which presents the perspectives of seven individual concert-goers over the course of the evening. It's all fiction, even the hypothetical tour during which the show takes place; although I did create setlists for every show leading up to the night in question. It's not even supposed to replicate the Katz incident precisely—it was just inspired by it.

"However, as you'll discover, it's not as heavy-handed as that might suggest. Like the Dead scene itself, there is more than meets the ear, as the story also encompasses miracles and near misses, the killer and the kind, doses and duds, female Muppets, the Fairy Wing Guild, the stall sisterhood, the merits of Charles Bukowski and Marcel Proust, the connections between *Full House* and *ALF*, seat surfing, scurvy, setlist games, Schoolhouse Rock, Shakedown Street, tape trees, the Philsbury Doughboy, Three Bean Monty, crock-pots, counties, custies, dog liberation, DATs, Griffin Dunne films and fire dancing. After all, the circus is in town.

"Due to space considerations, the following excerpt presents only four of the characters. You'll have to pick up the book to meet lot sage Bagel Bob, join Zeb's frantic mission to score a ticket and travel with Robin as she flies solo."

Here's a moment early on, in which Ted arrives, along with his wife, Rez, and younger sibling, Tommy.

TAPER TED

(All right, here we go. Into the parking lot. Now the real freak show begins. You're not going to buy a T-shirt out here, are you, big bro?)

"I don't think so. Why?"

(I remember a couple of years ago when all you wore were those bootleg Dead T-shirts. You were buying all your clothes in parking lots. My vicarious embarrassment induced a mild case of aphasia.)

"Well you'll be happy to know those shirts don't interest me much these days. Back then it meant something. Those shirts were made by kids trying to support their tours. Nowadays there are plenty of tie-dye corporations out here getting rich."

(If you say so.)

"Consider it said."

(And what do they call the area with the makeshift little flea market where everyone rolls out their ratty little tapestries and sells kind veggie burritos laced with bacteria and other pathogens? It's named after a song right? Shitstorm Street? Shitshow Street? I'm pretty sure the word shit is in there to reference the dysentery to follow.)

"Shakedown Street. How many shows have you been to?"

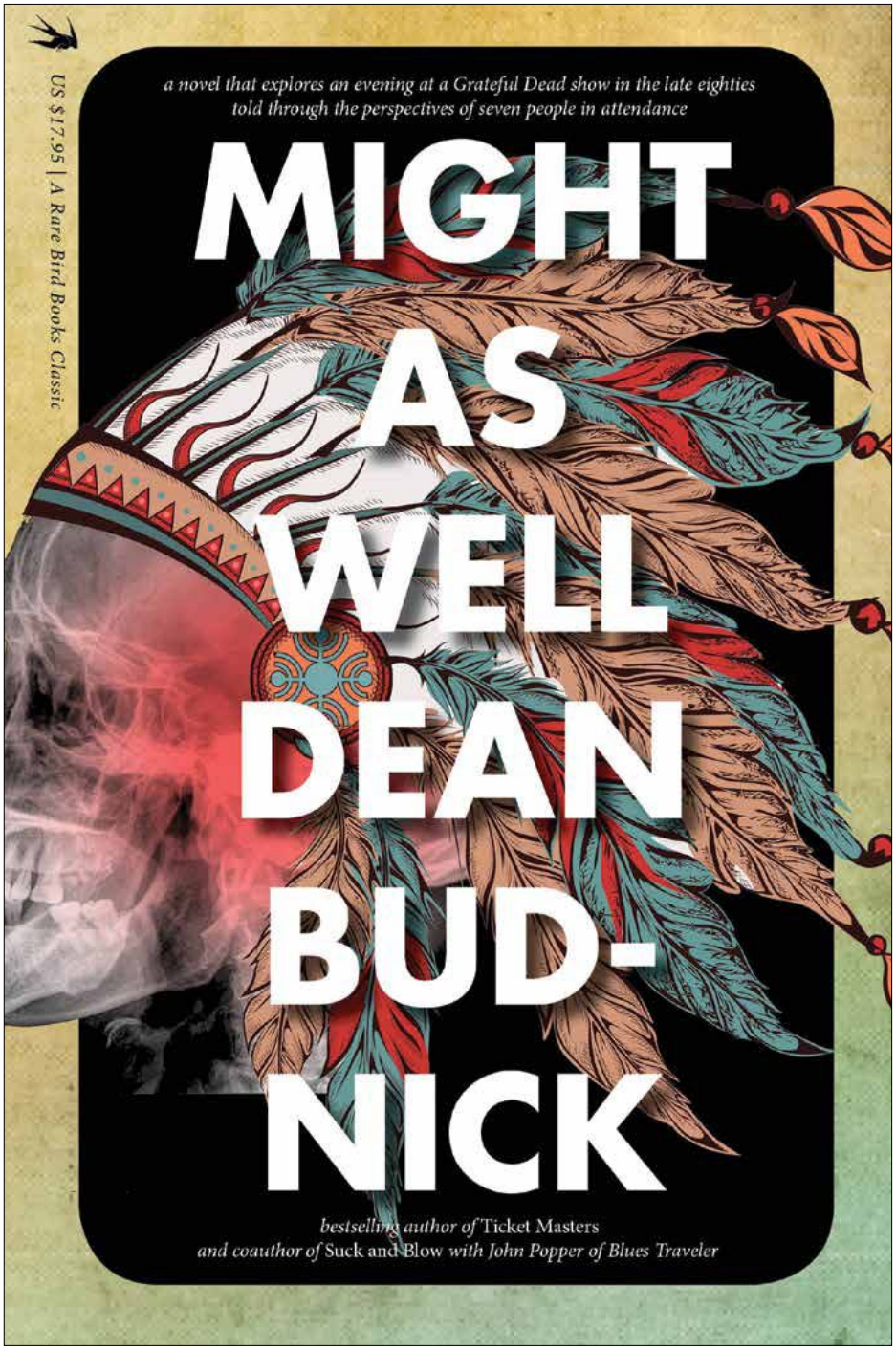
(I don't know. Nine? Ten? You should know. You were the one who took me to all of them. Come on, you can remember how many times the Dead played 'Hully Gully' but you can't recall how many times you've taken your only brother to see this band?)

"Well they only pulled the 'Hully Gully' once. Netherlands '81. Killer show. That night they also busted out 'Lovelight' and 'Gloria.' 10/16/81. Bobby's birthday**.** That's the only reason I can think of why they broke out both of those. The tragic story of it all is that Rez and I had thought about hitting some of those Europe shows for a belated honeymoon but I lucked into a promotion and couldn't leave..."

(Right, right.)

"Shame on me. The Europeans understand work-life balance. When you ask an American what he does, he talks about his job, while a European will talk about his hobbies, his passions. I could have spent two perfectly lovely weeks mesmerizing strangers with a spirited challenge to the endemic mislabeling of the 'Mind Left Body Jam.' Perhaps I'd open up the discussion to include 'Spanish Jam' although that's a little on the nose for me...Tom? Tommy? You have nothing snide to say about any of that?"

(Sorry Ted, but as surprising as this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a novel that explores an evening at a Grateful Dead show in the late eighties
told through the perspectives of seven people in attendance
MIGHT AS WELL DEAN BUD-NICK
bestselling author of Ticket Masters
and coauthor of Suck and Blow with John Popper of Blues Traveler

sounds, I just wasn't listening to you. I was distracted by this guy who was yelling, 'How much would you pay for an exotic animal? How much would you pay for an exotic animal?' What the hell was that?)

"I don't know, he just does it."

(You know him?)

(Ted and I have heard him do that before. Not this tour but last summer, I think.)

(And what does he mean?)

"Mean?"

(Tommy, I don't think he means anything. He's just producing syllables, talking to hear himself talk.)

(Talking to hear himself talk? About the strike price for an exotic animal? Did you ever check it out?)

"Why should we?"

(Why should you? I don't know but if I were walking around a parking lot and someone asked me how much I'd pay for an exotic animal, at the very least I'd name my price. I'd do it right now but I lost the guy. I had him in my sights and then he disappeared. I can't hear him anymore, either. With every single car blasting a different Grateful Dead tape, it's all cacophony."

"Cacophony?"

(Hey, I have a college degree. It came fully equipped with vocabulary. So did my medical degree for that matter. My competence might well surprise you.)

"That's a matter of contention. As for the exotic animal guy, I've run into him and plenty of others like him who are on their own trip or are just doing it to get attention. I prefer to stay in my own lane and let them pass. Your problem, little brother, is you need to get in some more shows."

(Get in some more shows? Do you even hear yourself? Get in some more shows? You make it sound like it's a chore or something. I mean, it is for me but you shouldn't talk like that. As if there's some intrinsic value to attending 20 or 30 more Grateful Dead concerts a year beyond just hanging a few more notches on your belt. Of course maybe that explains why you're here, you could use a few more notches on your belt. Speaking as your doctor, that expanding waistline of yours is a matter of concern.)

"My *future* doctor."

(I wouldn't be your future doctor if you gave me the proper time of day for a consultation.)

"I'm not going to treat you as my doctor and I'm not going to refer to you as my doctor until you complete your residency. In fact, I'm not going to call you doctor at all."

(That is a common faux pas. At this point in my medical career I have definitively earned the proper title of doctor.)

"Is that true? I'm asking the Bloch-head next time I see him."

(Justin Bloch. I'm never quite sure how to take it when I'm reminded that the chairman of our department is a Deadhead.)

"We are everywhere."

Steven is a high school student on spring break from an area boarding school. This

prep-school hippie, who is about to attend his first show, is en route with some of his friends.

STEVEN

(Hey, Steven, change the tape.)

"Hmmmm?"

(Change the tape.)

"Right, sorry. I was zoning."

(Well, try not to zone so much when you're driving.)

"Nate, man, I'm not driving."

(Yeah, right. Okay, you can zone then but not until after you change the tape.)

(And put it in the case or my brother will kill me.)

"Okay, okay. So what do you want to hear?"

(You're up there. Whatever looks good to you.)

"Hey, Jason, what's this show like? It looks pretty cool."

(Come on, Steven, you know you can't tell a tape from the setlist.)

Oh, yeah, right.

(No, that's not necessarily true. Have you ever heard a bad 'Dark Star?')

"Yeah, have you?"

(Well okay, you may be right there. But you can't tell with the other stuff. Besides some of the 'Star's are better than others.)

"But they're all basically good."

(None of them are basic; all of them are good.)

(And how is that show Steven has in his hand?)

(Hot.)

(Well then what are you yapping about?)

(I'm just keeping him on his toes.)

"Well I'm sitting down in here so it won't do me much good."

(Maybe I should direct my own foot to your ass and apply some force.)

(If that's what gets you off...)

"Yeah, Jason, just ask. I can be permissive."

(Nice vocab. But you know what I don't understand?)

"Fractions?"

(How to properly apply deodorant?)

"The particulars of the baby-making process?"

(What chicken tastes like?)

"*New Yorker* cartoons?"

(*New Yorker* cartoons, really? What is this, AP after-school strivers club?)

(Hey, man, let Steven be Steven.)

(Well, that's my point. I'm happy to let Steven be Steven, as long as you can do the same, Nate. Stevie's a big boy. You don't have to chime in for him.)

(I'm a lover not a chimer. We're in this together. You're either on the bus or you're off the bus and all of us here are on the bus.)

(Huh? What bus? This is a Volvo 240.)

(Never mind Zack, just drive.)

This section introduces Randy, who will be working security at the venue. His car has broken down and he's finally made his way to a service station.

RANDY

"No freaking way."

(Sorry, Macho Man.)

"No freaking way."

(That's the best I can do for you, Macho.)

"Man, is that necessary?"

(The vehicle won't run without a clutch, Macho. You'll need a new one.)

"It's not my car but that Macho crap, consider my balls already busted by the broken-ass Chevette I can barely fit into that your guy towed here, which already cost me 50 bucks."

(I thought you said your name was Randy.)

"Yeah?"

(Well I figured you for a hero. You're big enough to be a hero. Macho Man Randy Savage all the way.)

"I don't know anything about that."

(You don't know if you're a hero? Who are you, King Kong Bundy?)

"I'm just a kid who's late for work. My coach pulled a few strings and if I don't make it on time, he's going to be pissed. I'll be cut during spring practice and never play next season."

(Where do you play?)

"Morristown Tech."

(So are you a hero or a villain?)

"Are *you* a hero or a villain?"

(It's impolite to answer a question with a question but I am clearly a hero. Not to brag, but we're talking superhero. You see this Citgo logo on my shirt? I've got pyramid power. What do you got?)

"A dick friend who let me borrow his car."

(Well be a hero, Macho Man. Pony up the $500 for him.)

"I'm not ponying jack."

(I'm Sal, not Jack. Where are you headed anyhow?)

"I'm working in the lot over at the Grateful Dead show tonight."

(Security?)

"Yeah."

(Then you *are* the villain.)

"Nah, I'm just there to do whatever I'm told for a few days."

(Like keeping nitrous tanks out of the parking lot?)

"If that's what they ask me to do."

(Like I said, you *are* the villain. You know what my attitude is toward nitrous oxide? I follow Nancy Reagan's campaign leadership and I just say NO. Get it, I just say N-O.)

"I get it, but NO is actually the chemical formula for nitric oxide. I believe you're thinking of N_20 which is the formula for nitrous oxide, laughing gas."

(Really?)

"Not up for debate. It's an oxide of nitrogen."

(No, do you really need to be such a prick? I was making a joke.)

"What do you want from me, I'm a chemistry major."

(Ahhh, a six-foot-two-inch science nerd.)

"Six-three. So you think nitrous tanks are heroic?"

(What can I tell you, I like to laugh. I once saw Nancy Reagan on an episode of *Different Strokes*, although that didn't make me laugh.)

"And what's all this with the heroes and villains?"

(Don't you watch the WWF? Everybody's a hero or a villain.)

"Nah. I'm just a kid on scholarship hoping to make his coach happy and earn a little scratch to take his girl out next weekend. I'm supposed to be there at five and the goddamn clock is ticking."

(I'll tell you what, if you promise to act like a hero, I'll give you a ride over there on my bike. I'm headed out in 30 minutes.)

"I don't have the $500."

(Well, make sure your buddy has it in the morning. And don't Iron Sheik me over there if you see me enjoying a balloon or having a puff.)

"Now why would I do that?"

Jumping ahead to a bit later in the book, in this sequence, three-year-old Stella makes the rounds with her mom out in the hallway during setbreak.

STELLA BLUE

"Mommy!"

(What, Stella?)

"Come here. Down here. Bend down."

(What, honey?)

"It's like the carnival in here."

(I know what you mean. That's why I like it. The people are all wearing clothes with pretty colors and smiling and dancing. I agree with you, Stell.)

"No, Mommy, it's like the carnival because it's like that time you and I went to the carnival and we were walking around and I couldn't see anything because everyone was too tall."

(Oh. Right. Would you like me to pick you up?)

"Mommy, I'm not a baby."

(Okay, then would you like to sit on my shoulders? Only big girls do that because babies don't have strong enough backbones so they would fall off their mommies onto the floor and splatter.)

"Mommy!"

(Sorry, Stell Belle, your mother is spending too much time with Aunt Jenny. So, what do you say, up on my shoulders? Let me carry your load.)

"Okay."

(Alright. Up we go, one-two-three-uhhh.

Whoa, you're getting heavy, Stell. I need to talk to Grammy about sneaking you those Keebler Magic Middles when you're at her place.)

"I like the elves."

(They are tasty, that's for sure. I don't know how many of them they grind up into each cookie to mix with that gooey chocolate center, but I like my Keebler Magic Middles extra elfy.)

"Mommmmeeee!"

(Sorry, sorry. I won't blame Aunt Jenny for that one. Okay, let's go for a walk. Now, remember, if you want me to turn, ask nicely, don't pull on my hair like I'm a horsie and those are the reins.)

"I know, Mommy. Hey, look over there. Look at all the people. What's that?"

(Oh, they're all standing around the water fountain. They're hot and sweaty, so they want to drink some nice healthy water.)

"No, not the water fountain, over there."

(Oh, yeah, that's the line for the bathroom... Do you have to go, Stella?)

"Okay."

(Yeah, I was afraid to ask. Not do you want to go but do you really have to? If you do, I'll stand in line with you and we can wait. But if you can hold it in, we should probably go later when the line's not so long.)

"I can wait, Mommy."

(Good thinking Stella, we'll go later.)

"No, Mommy, I can wait in line."

(Because you need to or because you want to?)

"I want to because I need to."

(Well, I can't argue with that. Come on, let's go. Let me put you down.)

"No, Mommy, I want to stay up here."

(You want to stay on my shoulders?)

"Uh-huh."

(Okay, fine, here we go.)

(Beautiful child.)

(Thank you... Did you hear that Stella?)

"That man had big eyes."

(You're right, he did.)

(Remember jazz isn't dead; it just smells funny!)

"I think she smells funny."

(Stella!)

"Everyone here smells a little funny."

(And what do you think about that?)

"It's funny."

(What else do you think?)

"Are juice bags bad?"

(Juice bags? I'm not quite sure what you mean. Is that like a juice box?)

"No, a juice bag. A man over there yelled at his friend and told him not to be such a juice bag."

(Well—haaa—I'm not so sure, I... Hold that thought, honey. Oh my god. Megan! Megan! Stella, can I put you down for a minute? Mommy sees an old friend of hers.)

"No, Mommy, I want to go to the bathroom."

(Come on, Stella, take my hand. We'll come back to the bathroom in a minute. Mommy wants to see her friend. Megan! Megan! Come on, Stella, let's walk a little faster.)

"I can't, Mommy."

(Megan! Megan! MEGAN!)

(Alison? Alison!)

(Megan! My god Megan! It's been like forever. How are you?)

"Mommy!"

(Megan, this is my daughter, Stella. Stella, give Aunt Megan a hug.)

"I don't want to. She smells super-duper funny."

(Stella!)

(The kid reminds me of your old running buddy, Jenny. Do you still see her?)

(She's here. In fact, she should be out here any minute now. Wow, it's good to see you. What have you been up to?)

I don't want to talk to Aunt Megan.

I want to go to the bathroom.

I'm going to run back and get in line.

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"Sometimes, with music, if you give yourself very specific parameters, you get more creative. If you were to put yourself in a tiny room, you could know every inch of that room. Whereas, if you were to put yourself in a mansion, you may not make it into a room on any given day." JOSH EPSTEIN

Dan Zott and his wild-tousled, fully animated partner-in-rock, Joshua Epstein (l-r)

JR JR drop the funny name without losing their indie charm in a corporate world

BY JEFF MILLER

Headphones & Earworms

IT'S A WARM NOVEMBER day in Miami, and I'm in an Uber when one of those obnoxious radio ads comes over the speakers on the local alt-rock station. "Discover new music," it insists, "JR JR: 'Gone.' 104.3, THE SHARK!!!" The song starts with a keyboard, then a plucked acoustic guitar, then an unmistakable earworm whistle-harmony—the kind you can imagine playing over and over again in trailers for movies about people far better looking than you are. The Uber driver is significantly impressed. "I think it's gonna be a smash hit," he says, as the drums kick in.

The two members of JR JR—the short-haired, conservative-looking Josh Epstein and his wild-tousled, fully animated partner-in-rock Daniel Zott—have heard hype like this before. Though they've been known as JR JR only for a short time, the band formerly known as Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr. has been on the next-big-thing treadmill for a while. (Their name change came from a desire to get taken a bit more seriously and to stop disappointed stalkers from showing up at their shows; the racecar driver they were previously named after actually was an on-the-record fan.)

The band's electro-chugging, after-party-friendly debut, *It's a Corporate World*, gained them worthy *huzzahs* from publications in all corners of the festival scene. Their single "If You Didn't See Me (Then You Weren't on the Dancefloor)," from their second record, *The Speed of Things*, is one of those imminently likeable songs you've heard a million times in a grocery store, restaurant or commercial but can't place. In both albums' cases, Zott and Epstein were ready for something resembling indie-rock stardom—and then circumstances changed.

"The first time we put out an album, both of our A&R guys got fired immediately after it came out. The second time we put out an album, the lady who was running the company got fired. The people who were enthusiastic about us ended up getting let go—and we got caught in the switching of

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JR JR + 1

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT AN up-and-coming indie-rocker and a journalist collaborate on a song. But a year ago, just after he moved to LA, JR JR co-frontman Josh Epstein and I were introduced through mutual friends, and soon became buddies-by-food. My day job as the editor of the lifestyle website Thrillist and Epstein's penchant for Korean BBQ (and both of our fairly loosey-goosey schedules) meant that we ended up at lunch together regularly. And when the guitarist for my indie-rock tribute band Black Crystal Wolf Kids had a baby last year, Epstein filled in for a couple of shows. So, when I started working on this feature about JR JR for *Relix*, it was a no-brainer. Since we'd played music together already, to get to the bottom of what makes their songwriting work, I thought I'd work on a song with them.

To achieve full songwriting-ness, Epstein and I sat on the couch in my living room, surrounded by guitars, with a piano against the wall, but ended up strictly focused on his iPhone's GarageBand app. "This software limits us to six chords, which is a good thing."

I'm usually the first person to be skeptical when an artist has, say, an iPad onstage, but seeing the usefulness in person changes that: As I plug in diminished-minor chords, I realize that this could actually push the tonal possibilities further than if I had my hands wrapped around a guitar and was given the same you're-in-charge parameters. Epstein glances approvingly, trying to make the same chord shapes on a guitar—just in case.

So, should we write about food? Nah—we're not looking to get into Weird Al territory. But the session happened in December, and we are both Jewish, so what if we wrote a Christmas song about being left out of Christmas? "Love it," Epstein exclaims, "but what if it's just about feeling left out on Christmas in general."

"Like, 'If it's really Christmas, why do I feel so alone?'" I ask.

"Yes. That's the chorus!" He starts fiddling with the chords on the iPhone, concentrating; as he hits each one, he fiddles with the settings, creating cool, gurgly effects as the software automatically scrolls through notes. There's a Beatles-y whisper that emerges from his mouth as I watch him meander through some options, before he settles on a melody that weaves its way up the odd chord shapes I'd chosen, leaving a pause between words for extra emphasis. "OK. Why don't you come up with the rhythm of the verses?"

He drops a chord on repeat on the iPhone, and I start stutter-stepping: Ba-bah-ba-ba-bah-pa, ba pa pa pa pa."

"Yeah, I think we've got it," he says in a small haze, lying back on my couch in his buttoned-up flannel. "Let's write some lyrics."

After an hour, we've written a two-minute Christmas song. It's not much: two sad verses, two sad choruses, a little tag coda, and that's it. But Epstein clearly thinks we're on to something.

"What do you think of me sending this over to Dan and see what he thinks?" Epstein asks. "Maybe he'll be down to fill it out and we can give it the full JR JR treatment."

He hits send and, three minutes later, his phone blinks. He picks it up. He doesn't look surprised at all.

"Dan's in."

Two weeks later, the full song comes back from Epstein's bandmate: He's essentially rewritten the music, keeping the chord arrangement the same but adding in multiple keys, drums and backing vocals, including a chorus gurgling underneath the verses. In other words, it sounds like a JR JR song—which was the whole point to begin with.

You can hear "If It's Really Christmas (Why Do I Feel So Alone)" on Relix.com.

REDEMPTION SONG

Perpetual Groove have battled addiction, passing fads and at least a few seemingly permanent breakups, but Georgia's once-and-future jamband hope still believe in second chances

BY BRIAN BAVOSA

IT'S THE SECOND night of Perpetual Groove's sold-out engagement at New York's Brooklyn Bowl, and Brock Butler is standing alone onstage. As smoke slowly envelops him, the 36-year-old guitarist begins to strum the innocent chords to "Life," the opening track of Perpetual Groove's 2004 album, *All This Everything*, a gentle instrumental that has come to serve as a poignant reminder of his band's often emotional, lonely and difficult world.

Eventually, as the song begins to flourish, Butler's longtime bandmates—bassist Adam Perry, keyboardist Matt McDonald and drummer Albert Suttle—emerge from the wings and join him onstage, offering support and the much-missed sonic soundscapes that have defined PGroove—as they are affectionately known to fans—since their early days on the Southeast club circuit nearly 20 years ago.

These packed Brooklyn Bowl performances are PGroove's first New York plays since the group's core four members reunited at the Georgia Theatre in Athens this past May. This followed a two-year hiatus and almost a decade of inner turmoil and personnel swaps, often spurred on by Butler's struggles with addiction.

Despite their rocky trajectory, the group's classic lineup remains razor-sharp onstage, a constant reminder of why PGroove gradually became one of the jamband scene's greatest hopes at the dawn of the modern indie-rock era and drew thousands of fans to marquee stages at Bonnaroo, Jam Cruise and High Sierra. They are responsible for some of the best psychedelic-rock records of the early aughts and, as the hippe-rock festival scene gradually became more eclectic, they served as a natural conduit between the sounds of The Flaming Lips and Phish.

"Since getting in the same room and playing music together again, there's a lot of mutual respect and love and brotherhood and camaraderie," McDonald says of their recent reunion, acknowledging, without getting too spiritual about it, that the music itself is very real. "All the energy coming from the fans—that's why

Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger: Adam Perry, Brock Butler, Matt McDonald, Albert Suttle (l-r)

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people love to go to shows, that's why we make music, for *that*."

THOUGH PERPETUAL GROOVE'S CURRENT lineup first played together in 2001, the group actually has a pre-history that dates back a little earlier to when Butler met Perry at the Savannah College of Art and Design in 1997. After jamming together and realizing their shared love for the sound and production techniques that they were studying in film classes, Butler and Perry formed an embryonic version of PGroove with keyboardist Brett Hinton and drummer Joe Stickney. The group remained together through college and even released a self-titled album, before Hinton and Stickney moved on once the other two decided to take the project on the road.

"Coming out of high school, I was listening to a lot of stuff like Sublime, and that was coming through in our playing," Butler told Jambands.com in 2005. "But Joe was from Alabama, and he turned me on to John Scofield and Medeski Martin & Wood—that was a real big change for me, hearing *A Go Go*. (Stickney later went on to find blog buzz with Bear In Heaven.)

After a chance encounter at an open-mic night, Butler and Perry started playing with McDonald and Suttle, both of whom were actively enlisted in the U.S. Army, and served in the U.S. Army Band, and they began to balance their commitments to PGroove with their military assignments.

Thanks to regular gigs at J.J. Cagney's in Savannah, the group found their feet onstage and whipped their live show into shape. PGroove started barnstorming through the South, moving to Athens and developing into a house band at the city's crown jewel, the Georgia Theatre, eventually expanding their reach throughout the country and internationally. (Their name was so synonymous with the Georgia Theatre that the club even helped throw Perry a surprise 30th birthday party.)

Each member of the quartet grew into their roles: Butler remained the emotive center of the PGroove universe; Perry served as the outfit's badass, rock-and-roll heartthrob; McDonald functioned as their multi-talented sonic maestro and de facto

Perry, Perpetual Groove's badass, rock-and-roll heartthrob, in action.

An older, wiser and healthier Perpetual Groove performing at Denver's Cervantes' Masterpiece Ballroom in December.

ALOC Media

spokesman; and Suttle, a gentle giant, who allows his witty T-shirts to do most of his talking for him, was a thunderous presence behind the kit.

With a sound that married fourth-wave jamband styles like groove-funk, space-rock and light livetronica with the founding members' keen interest in cinematic production and an overall appreciation for covering modern rockers like Secret Machines and LCD Soundsystem, PGroove were pegged as their generation's shining stars. For a while, they leapfrogged around the country with peers like Umphrey's McGee and shared the stage with more established acts like moe., Michael Franti and the Disco Biscuits.

Sweet Oblivious Antidote and *All This Everything* emphasized the band's studio chops and Butler's advanced songwriting skills, and his solo career spotlighted a mature, Paul Simon influence that set him apart from other acts in the scene. They utilized surround sound on tour and, for several years, even organized their own multi-day gathering in Georgia, Amberland.

Although the band's musical camaraderie was rooted in a strong bond and brotherhood that dates back to their college days (and shortly thereafter), there were underlying squabbles and tensions that would ultimately hamper PGroove's growth for years to come.

Butler had a reputation for being a partier, but the extent of his growing addictions was shielded from a large part of their audience. The first real crack came in 2008 when the group parted ways with McDonald, due to personal reasons, and replaced him with another friend, John Hruby. (The band commonly describes those in their musical orbit as "friends."). Jamband music had also started to face a dry spell and, like other acts, they started to struggle in some markets.

After a few years, Hruby, too, eventually wanted out, and PGroove wooed McDonald—who had been working at an orthopedic clinic—back to resume his duties on keyboards and, occasionally, guitar, after a one-off reunion and an evening of *Monday Night Football* with Perry. As the clock struck midnight on Dec. 31, 2011, McDonald replaced Hruby onstage and has remained with the band ever since.

"Earlier that year, the four of us spent time together for the first time [since I left the band], but they were playing a wedding and I played with them that night," McDonald says. "That opened the doors to a familiar feeling that happens with the four of us. It was really great."

McDonald's return energized the band and they continued to work on new material on and off the stage, often touring in a more methodical manner that allowed time for family and other personal commitments. But after a while, things started moving down a familiar path: The group was not happy with their management and branding, the road and all of its pitfalls continued to wear the musicians down, and Butler's drug problems were deeper than ever.

Things came to a head in early 2013 when Butler hit rock bottom and left the group due to his battle with substance abuse, effectively placing PGroove on hiatus. Drugs had become his primary focus, and, as he admits, his onstage performance suffered. He also owns that he's primarily at fault for the events that transpired before the band's breakup. "I'm not dismissing that if there's a lion's share and fair, appropriate direction for anger to be directed, I'll accept that," he says. "For a long time, I was angry, too. That's why I'm a nihilist now. [*Laughs.*] At the end of the day, you have to own the choices you make."

McDonald is brutally honest when he describes Butler's struggles with addiction. Recalling the main issues that broke up PGroove while backstage at Brooklyn Bowl,

Brock Butler, the band's emotive center, shows off his solo, acoustic side in Denver.

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he tells the story in a concise, controlled manner: Butler had a serious drug dependence, was eventually arrested and went to drug court.

When asked if he was mad at the circumstances, McDonald responds: "Yeah, I was fucking furious. We all were. Then we were also scared to death. The things that were in play and the catalyst that launched it probably couldn't have been worse. We were all scared and then we realized it had a full grip on our boy because even after it was discovered and addressed, that didn't mean it stopped. So [being] on the road was not good. And no matter what town we went to, there was somebody, somewhere, for all of us. It's not like all of us didn't have our demons, too, so all of these things were exacerbated. It felt like going on the road was supporting what was happening and we couldn't support that any longer. For Brock and for ourselves, we couldn't do it to anybody involved—to our families, to our agent, to everyone. It just wasn't fair. Everything needed to stop and Brock needed to address his addiction."

> "My life is better with Perpetual Groove in it, but my life does not completely depend on it."
> **BROCK BUTLER**

Butler sits quietly as McDonald recounts this time period, simply nodding in agreement. "Accessibility is a constant struggle for me," he finally adds. Butler is an intelligent paradox, playful and able to make light of the darkest subjects, much like he does with his emotive lyrics. He is lovable and loyal, has a teddy-bear-like quality and wears his heart on his sleeve, which are his best traits and also, ultimately, glaring weaknesses. Simply put, he loves to be loved.

As much as he's known for his role in PGroove, he's equally lauded for his often impromptu solo acoustic sets, performed in any place and at any time. However, those sometimes seemed to enable his problems, too. "If I had gone to some hotel after-party last night and broke out the acoustic, that would have been incredibly special for however many people that were there," he says. "But if I had showed up here today and had not behaved myself the night before, and if my performance for the actual product is compromised or not at its fullest, then it's kind of selfish or inconsiderate to the people that are paying for the advertised show."

As McDonald sums up, life on the road has always been a struggle for the band: "There has to be a balance, like you said. It's a constant balancing act."

AFTER BUTLER ABRUPTLY RESIGNED FROM PGroove, his then-former bandmates quickly formed a side-project, Ghost Owl, and released one album, *Say Goodbye to Finland*. Butler was so far out of the picture that he wasn't even aware of the project until he read about it in an interview.

McDonald believes that it was, in part, a knee-jerk reaction to what was happening

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LOVE TO SAY DADA

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE STAY TRUE TO THEIR WEIRD

BY JESSE JARNOW

Tom Andrew

A band by any other name: Geologist (Brian Weitz), Avey Tare (Dave Portner) and Panda Bear (Noah Lennox)

It's a globally warmed December Thursday in Chelsea and delivery vans and bike messengers and chauffeur-driven SUVs and art-tourists pass at varying speeds through the foreground and background, when along comes a car—more or less at the predetermined time—and out step Animal Collective. It's not a terribly organic entrance, but it's the best that could be engineered. Animal Collective are the kind of band that come to New York just for a day to do press.

It's not like I know any of the band, exactly, but it's nice to see them anyway—familiar faces from their decade-and-a-half rise from the turn-of-the-century psychedelic-experimental corner of New York's music grotto to the global stage. There are three Animals present today, on the sidewalk and on their newest album: Dave Portner, known on record as Avey Tare; Noah Lennox, going by Panda Bear; and Brian Weitz, who does his synth-work under the name Geologist. The Collective's fourth, Josh Dibb (aka Deakin), is absent for this album/tour/manifestation, but that's the deal, and maybe he'll be back next time, or maybe he won't. Their management rep departs and art beckons.

The idea was to go for a gallery hop because the band's newest and 11th dazzling, and unpredictable, album is called *Painting With*. While this had seemed a tad literal at first, in practice, it's only mildly awkward, as meeting new people sometimes is, but probably no more artificial than anything else on their individual plates this week, which also include a satellite radio appearance in New York, a DJ set at Art Basel Miami, playing new music at an ambient festival in Los Angeles and who-knows-what/where-else. Animal Collective officially went international a dozen years back, when Lennox relocated to Lisbon, and while they previously lived in New York, the only place that Animal Collective were ever really *from* is Baltimore, where all four met growing up. A week or so earlier, over Thanksgiving, *Painting With* "debuted" on the Baltimore airport public address system, just because, although none of them were flying through to hear it.

Wandering through the white-walled spaces of the art gallery mini-mall in Manhattan, only Portner resembles someone who might call himself "Avey Tare," in an eye-catching neo-futurist shirt and Steal Your Face necklace. His fellow Collectivists, on the other hand, look pretty much like the music-obsessive thirtysomething young dads they are. At Garvey Simon Art Access, we awe at some of Christopher Adams' surrealist botanical ceramics, and handmade glitch art by Karen Shaw seems to catch everyone's attention.

In another space, while a dealer quietly shows a painting to a client, or a client's surrogate, Lennox excitedly calls his bandmates over after he discovers a book of dada art at the gallery's desk. Of all the 20th-century art movements, dada's purposefully purposeless strategies are a fine match for Animal Collective, whose music obscures their harmony-laden hooks and traditional song forms in a barrage of hyper-cut electronic arrangements, falsetto leaps or other discombobulating measures. Portner recalls the time during Animal Collective's New York days, when their music was at its scrappiest; he'd worked as an art handler, often moving work into and around Chelsea into spaces like these.

By now, though, Animal Collective have made feature-length visual albums and done cryptic installations in the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda of the Guggenheim. Animal Collective occupy a different part of the creative economy than the overgrown college students who they sometimes resemble—more art than handler, and art in the transglobal 21st-century sense, recording for the international Domino Records and achieving festival status overseas. Animal Collective are *nearly* a veteran band, if they aren't already. Like many Animal Collective projects before it, *Painting With* is a breakthrough, stripping out some of the more obscuring elements of their music and leaving Portner and Lennox's singular jumping melodies and syllable-echoing arrangements on crystal-clear display, while enriching the tracks with an array of analog percussion. In the traditional narrative, 15 years in, now is about the time when the younger hungrier weirdos start yipping their way into the frame, but Animal Collective aren't a traditional band. Like many bands of their generation, they never intended to be a band at all and have stayed as weird as they always promised they were.

"That's how the Dead shows used to feel to me. I was just amazed by the outfits people'd put on and get super into it, and how everybody just liked to do that around each other."

DAVE PORTNER

Famously—or perhaps not, if you're not an Animal Collective fan—their earliest releases didn't bear the "Animal Collective" name at all but their individual pseudonyms. "We wanted to do it more like jazz musicians would do it," featuring only the names of the players, says Lennox when we're done with the gallery hop and have located the first bar that looks like it might be quiet enough to talk in.

Though, Weitz says, "working with record labels, they were, like, 'You really need to have all your records in one section and a band name.'" But the impulse to not be a band (or not be "Animal Collective") has never really left them. In some ways, many of Animal Collective's projects can seemingly be traced to the impulse to express that they're still not *that* kind of band.

This iteration of the not-a-band sentiment arose, Weitz says, while recording 2007's *Strawberry Jam*, when Portner wanted to call the album *The Painters*, or perhaps change the group's name to The Painters altogether, *Sgt. Pepper*'s-style. The name got nixed until—when distributing his demos for the album to his bandmates early last year—Lennox named his batch "The Painters." Through the hermetic Animalistic process, it transformed into *Painting With*. Said in full extension—*Painting With Animal Collective*—it evokes the type of bebop albums Portner says he's been listening to lately.

"Whenever we send each other demos, we make it under fake band names," Weitz says, "not really for security reasons, just for fun."

"But kind of for security reasons," Lennox adds. All shake their heads, recalling the time their group email got hacked just before the holidays in 2008, strangers sending ghosted messages from their account to Bradford Cox of Deerhunter, among others.

It was around the same time as the hack, too, just before the release of 2009's *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, that dominant songwriter Avey Tare first noticed the band's fans starting to sing along to songs before they'd even officially released them. Weitz (his Geologist name recalling the spelunker's lamp he wears onstage) remembers sing-alongs happening even earlier, perhaps with "Banshee Beat" from 2005's *Feels*.

"We wanted to do it more like jazz musicians would do it, featuring only the names of the players," Noah Lennox says of the band's hesitation to write "Animal Collective" on their album covers.

Hisham Akira Bharoocha & Abby Portner

Probably, these are all outgrowths of the decision to solidify their name as Animal Collective, a brand that can continue pumping out material, even when the individual musicians themselves are idle. While there hasn't been an Animal Collective album since 2012's *Centipede Hz*, the quartet was hardly silent, with Lennox out recording and touring (and calling back to the bigger project) as Panda Bear with 2015's *Panda Bear Vs. the Grim Reaper* and Portner doing the same with his band Avey Tare's Slasher Flicks the year before. Portner, Weitz and Dibbs have taken to doing DJ sets under the Animal Collective banner at various locales on both coasts.

Since their loose founding a decade and a half back, there've now been 20 full-lengths among the four of them, including the band's "visual album," and the solo debut of Deakin, scheduled for release this spring, around the same time as *Painting With*. While known/praised/dismissed (maybe) as indie-hipster electricians or nu-EDM jammers or nonsense-chanting beat-makers, Animal Collective are rarely acknowledged for what they've actually done: uncovered a truly far-out kind of new psychedelia as genuinely disassociating and odd as any mythic LP that has or hasn't been yet (re)discovered and/or reissued. And *Painting With* does this in whole new ways. Animal Collective are professional still-evolving psychedelic heroes for the here and now.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I WONDER WHY Animal Collective are as popular as they are, which is in no way any kind of criticism. I love Animal Collective. Animal Collective are my kind of music: noisy and layered and cryptic and ambitious. It's hard to understand most of the words, which come out in strangely pitched jumbles (with nice harmonies) and interrupt themselves. Avey observes that a lot of their favorite bands, like Pavement, were hard to understand, too.

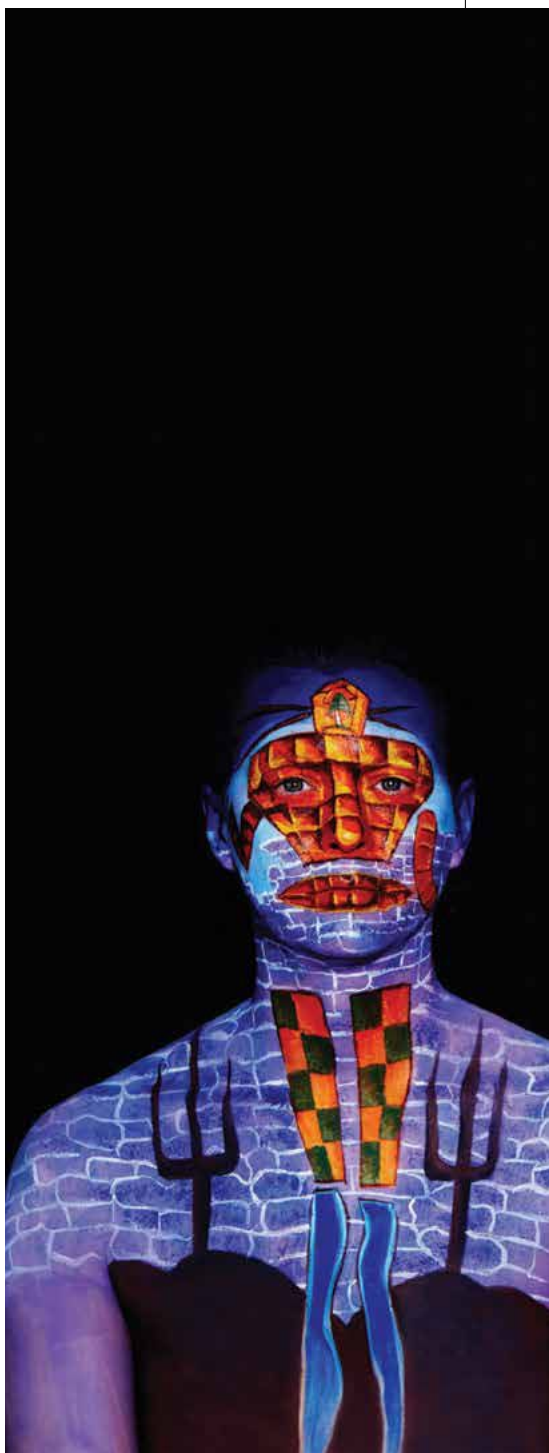
And while none of their albums have cracked the Top 10 quite yet, or even gone gold, Animal Collective have one of *those* fanbases that dresses up for shows and smokes a lot of pot and trades live recordings and requires record company publicity departments to send out strictly water-marked file-streams. Non-fans write blog/Twitter/Bing/new-media-du-jour rants about why the band is popular, why they suck, why they represent fill-in-the-blank about hipsters/hippies/yuppies/yupsters. The not-as-satirical-as-you'd-think Hipster Runoff blogger known as Carles once built a whole vocabulary around AnCo. Editors put them on covers of magazines and at the top of websites. Staking a unique turf somewhere between avant-pranksters and indie-pop heroes, Animal Collective have constructed themselves a musical world, even if not everybody is so sure what to make of it.

In the spring of 2010, I went to the Guggenheim in New York to see the band "perform" *Transverse Temporal Gyrus*, which turned the inside of the museum's rotunda into a tapestry for collaborator Danny Perez's projections, while a new multi-channel generative sound installation rang through the space, creating a continuously new piece of music. Just off the center of the iconic rotunda, three figures stood on pedestals in giant bunny-overlord masks and stared unswervingly at the crowd. Some audience members were more bewildered than others. One group of fans (in face paint and headbands) bowed down in front of the bunny-overlords. At one point in the night, a woman next to me stood in front of one of the figures and announced very loudly, "I'll give you a blow job if you just play a fucking song." There were no songs played.

The bunny-overlord in question turned out to be Deakin. "I've often wondered if Josh was making that up," says Weitz. It wasn't one of the band's more well-received affairs, nor was *ODDSAC*, the 53-minute "video album," also released in 2010, that featured an entirely original score but also all four Animals acting in bizarre sketches. It had begun when somebody asked them to make a tour DVD. While the installations at the Guggenheim certainly could have been more immersive and should have been much, much louder (and is more captivating on its 2012 12-inch release), the weirdness and psychedelic discomfort were palpable.

"My aunt saw a review and got the gist that we'd done something possibly unpopular and sent my wife this note that said it sounded 'fearless.' It's a weird compliment," says Weitz. "I don't know if I've ever gotten a compliment like that before for doing something that you cared about and really made some people pissed off and unhappy with you. Even though we had no intention of upsetting anybody by doing it, we were thinking about doing it for people like us." He fondly remembers an afternoon at the Whitney in the group's early days, when he and his non-bandmates came across a mind-blowing installation by the video artist Bill Viola without knowing quite what they were getting into.

But all of that's OK because, then, there are times when Animal Collective do things that remind everybody why it's blindingly obvious that they're as popular as they are,



"My aunt saw a review and got the gist that we'd done something possibly unpopular and sent my wife this note that said it sounded 'fearless.' It's a weird compliment. I don't know if I've ever gotten a compliment like that before for doing something that you cared about and really made some people pissed off and unhappy with you."
BRIAN WEITZ

Hisham Akira Bharoocha & Abby Portner

like the music on *Painting With*, which almost certainly heralds the beginning of a new period for the band. For a while, the duo/trio/quartet were lumped with "freak-folk" (maybe because of the acoustic *Campfire Songs* and the 2005 EP with British songwriter Vashti Bunyan), and they've been partially attached to "chillwave" (the sub-sub-genre used to describe some kind of hazy drum machine whateverness) and "blog-rock" (because, you know, the '00s). A generation of bands have taken on secondary floor tom percussionists and started chanting and gotten even more popular than Animal Collective, but none of them are Animal Collective. Perhaps because of their popularity, the group's earliest releases have come to reflect the periods during which they were made, but Animal Collective themselves keep squirming by and finding new spaces for themselves.

While the Grateful Dead are a popular reference point for Animal Collective—and the band members are all knowledgeable Dead freaks—a more apt comparison might be Pink Floyd, had Floyd never shed their Syd Barrett-era weirdness or *Meddle*-period noise fascinations, and let them layer on top of one another like a double exposure, and then followed the heartbeat at the beginning of *The Dark Side of the Moon* onto German dance floors instead of American hockey arenas. Animal Collective are primo post-millennial stoner jams.

Viewed in the long arc, theirs has been a rich progression, which also doubles as an argument for why Animal Collective matter. Creating a psychedelic musical language that prizes temporal disassociation as much as harmony and fun, the non-formula has come to be expressed in all kinds of surprising ways across 15 years of releases. On the first "Animal Collective" album, *Spirit They're Gone, Spirit They've*

Vanished, initially credited to just Avey Tare and Panda Bear, the songs are all Portner's but the mindbender is Lennox's drumming, finding all kinds of inside-outside parts that naturally chase his old brah's narcotically bizarro tunes, and a secret weapon returning only sporadically to AnCo records.

There's 2003's all-acoustic *Campfire Songs* in the Crosby, Stills & Nash-like three-acoustic lineup of Deakin, Bear and Tare (recorded by Geologist). And then as the band's popularity gradually amped up, they contributed to the new psychedelic canon in various ways, from manic Avey crowd-pleasers like "The Purple Bottle" to edge-of-the-mainstream solo joints like Panda's "Comfy in Nautica." Songs like "My Girls" that have become part of a little catalog of modern staples, the type that spawn 8-bit reinterpretations and probably a bluegrass version or two. (Yup, Googling it, there's a bearded guy playing "My Girls" on banjo and effects pedals.)

"Since *Merriweather* [*Post Pavilion*], we've wanted it be really bass-heavy music, really rhythm-heavy music," says Portner, which (probably not coincidentally at all) is the closest the band has brushed up against the mainstream—Panda Bear soon turning up on Daft Punk's ubiquitous 2013 album *Random Access Memories*. Though Animal Collective don't have a bassist, they've found no shortage of low-end, coupling it to beats as well as sounds. What connects all of Animal Collective's music, from the hushed whisper of *Campfire Songs* to the catchall thump of "My Girls" is the sense of literal dreaminess, in which whole new rooms or scenes might appear suddenly or even violently.

"Dave had some book that had some quote like, 'If you're going to do psychedelic drugs, you can't just do it for the light side of the experience. You're going to get the light and the dark, you're going to get Jesus and the devil, and you're going to have to be ready to deal with both,'" says Weitz. "And I feel like our music has always had both sides—a fun side, but we also like horror movies, and a darker more sinister side. [On *Transverse Temporal Gyrus* and *ODDSAC*] we felt the more extreme experimental side of ourselves that we don't get to express much on what people think of as our proper records."

But *Painting With Animal Collective* is a proper Animal Collective record. And it is perhaps their most brightly jeweled and hyperreal yet.

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE DIDN'T SMOKE WEED in the studio this time. During the making of *Painting With* they did, however, vibe the place out as much as they could, dimming the lights and bringing in a small inflatable pool with plastic lily pads and floating tea candles. The place in question, EastWest Studios in Los Angeles, is known as "the *Pet Sounds* room" because it is the room where The Beach Boys recorded *Pet Sounds*. The in-house piano may or may not have been used by Brian Wilson, but it was definitely used by John Cusack playing Brian Wilson in the *Love and Mercy* biopic. "It was like being in a weird examining room," says Portner of the room where Carl Wilson sang "God Only Knows." All are Beach Boys fans, Portner shouting out *Smiley Smile* especially ("That was one of the first records I got stoned to") with its playful weirdness like "Love to Say Dada."

"We don't [smoke] in the studio anymore, but Asheville was a spacey time," says Weitz of the 12-day arranging session that the trio spent in North Carolina before heading in to record. The result, weed and/or no weed, is the most direct album that Animal Collective have yet recorded. There are guest appearances by the Velvet Underground's John Cale and Arcade Fire-affiliated saxophonist Colin Stetson. What's more notable, though, is the lack of reverb slathered over the band's vocals and synths—one of the band's signature musical effects often used as musical binding in the extended song transitions, which are also absent. The band has called *Painting With* their "Ramones record," songs dropping into fully bloomed weirdness with no preliminary build-up. Sonically, anyway, one might equally call it their DMT record, in that each song immediately explodes into its own kind of colorful weirdness and arrangements.

At the core of each is a skeletal performance by the bebopping Lennox, Portner and Weitz trio. "There'll be a rhythm track, a synth bassline and a melody line—one round of samples without me having to load a new sample onto the keyboard," says Weitz, who tried as often as possible to play parts live on a keyboard. The Avey/Panda vocal tandem, the most obviously identifiable part of Animal Collective, tried new methods, too. "We wrote vocals in a very specific new way for us," says Portner. "It was all arranged very specifically, we had an idea of how it was going to be. The lack of effects came because we wanted to orchestrate the vocals to make it so that two voices kind of made one."

"It was the first time we've written vocal parts for the other person," says Lennox, whose sometimes-not-uncharming aloofness is accurately reported, especially against his bandmates' more talkative tendencies. Usually, he explains, the band's vocal arranging style amounted to: "'It'd be cool if you did something here, either a harmony or just try to find your way in.' But, this time, it was like: 'This is the song. There are two voices in it. I'll sing this one, and you sing the other one.'"

In a lot of ways, it's Animal Collective's poppiest record yet—if there weren't any other ways to say that—but pop music only in the weird conception of its creators. Despite enormous indie hits like 2009's "My Girls" and "Summertime Clothes," I still have a hard time conceiving any of their music as accessible, but *Painting With* is as accessible as anything they've done. Returning to the live-in-the-studio clarity of 2005's *Feels*, the new music moves the band further down the electronic path than ever before. On "Lying in the Grass" and elsewhere, the band inches even further into the pop world.

"Genesis and Peter Gabriel's enormous pop success in [1986] is sorta like if Panda Bear and Animal Collective were to dominate the charts in 2017," observed music critic Matthew Perpetua (via Twitter) last year of the British prog-rock band's unlikely transformation from '70s AOR heroes to synth-happy '80s stadium poppers. And while it's hard to hear any tunes on *Painting With* that might do *that* exactly, unceasing pulsers like "Natural Selection" need no remixing to work on a dance floor.

"Brian, Josh and I started doing a lot more DJing [in 2015]," says Portner. "It was really their idea. We set up a West Coast DJ tour and figured it'd just be cool to hang out, and also go to clubs in that way, too, and just hear music in that way. And it really informed what we were thinking about making this record."

"It was a great way to share music with each other," says Weitz. "To say, 'I've been digging this, have you heard this track?' and not send it with a YouTube link but, like, [as if shouting over music] 'Have you heard this one?'" In that way, too, Animal Collective continue to define a new kind of 21st-century trans-global friendship/brahdom. A lot of the time, like many bands, Animal Collective exist not on the stage or in the studio, nor even the practice space or shared apartment or tour bus or hotel lounge, but in the everywhere/nowhere of group texts and emails and other shared data. It was, for example, during the first texts of what became *Painting*

"There's an energy that happens on the stage that doesn't happen in the studio. It was nice for us not to commit to anything before going in there, to just be really open-minded about it." DAVE PORTNER

Animal Collective as a quartet, circa 2012: Deakin, Panda Bear, Geologist and Avey Tare

With that the band determined Deakin would sit this round out.

"We all kind of thought Josh needed to finish up his stuff and it'd be too hectic for him," says Portner. And indeed, Deakin's long-awaited, Kickstarted solo debut will finally arrive in the spring, around the same time as *Painting With*. In this way, it's just another season of Animal music, which also includes the 23-minute "Michael, Remember," a warm-up jam by the trio on arriving in Asheville that should please anyone who wished AnCo did things that sounded more like *Seastones*-era "Dark Star" jams ("maybe smoke a little weed and just get into it," says Portner of the session), as well as "Swallow at the Hollow," a 26-minute collage of Panda Bear odds and sods.

When Animal Collective assemble in human form for many months of touring—and they say their schedules are blocked on/off for Animal activities until September 2017—they will be playing these songs live for the first time, which will mark the first time their songs came out on an album before they'd toured with them in their live show. It will, likewise, be one of the first Animal Collective tours that *doesn't* include an entirely new batch of unrecorded material. This, too, marks another kind of turning point in the band's career—one that most bands eventually hit sooner or later, and it's somewhat amazing that Animal Collective lasted as long as they did.

"It's nice to offer a version of a song that's going to be *the* one," says Portner. "Otherwise, fans'll latch on to that live version and then you put on the studio one and it's like, 'I miss how he sang that part' or 'I miss the energy.' There's an energy that happens on the stage that doesn't happen in the studio. It was nice for us not to commit to anything before going in there, to just be really open-minded about it." But he adds, "I think it's safe to say we'll always be a live band that approaches the live show separate from what it's like to record."

Should Animal Collective achieve Genesis-level of success in the next two or three years, though, one imagines them maintaining a much chiller tour bus than the British group. The interview eventually devolves into a long tangent about which major rock stars are still brahs. Do Crosby, Stills & Nash still get along, they wonder? (@thedavidcrosby would seem to indicate that it's complicated.) But Animal Collective seem to very much get along. They say they are happy to hang out when they're off-duty and in the same place, and all are seemingly looking forward to getting some close-quarters time with their old friends.

When in London recently, "We saw this British comedian we like, Noal Fielding, who was part of Mighty Boosh," Weitz says. "And he has this TV show called *Luxury Comedy*, and we went to see a live performance and people showed up in costume for that. It sort of feels like an Animal Collective audience, some people in makeup and dressing up, and out for a silly night. Serious fans."

Says Portner, not unwistfully, of the sessions, "That's how the Dead shows used to feel to me. I was just amazed by the outfits people'd put on and get super into it, and how everybody just liked to do that around each other."

They're *psyched* when people get dressed up for Animal Collective shows or when they come and tape. I point out that their shows are a pretty reliable zone of serious pot smoking, too, and the band all smile. One can imagine, as well, that should Animal Collective find that Genesis-like renaissance, the crowds would more resemble Deadheads, strangers stopping strangers and such. It's easy if you try.

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Reviews

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Dr. Dog

DR. DOG

The Psychedelic Swamp ANTI-

When **Dr. Dog** crept onto the scene in the early 2000s with their widely bootlegged debut, *The Psychedelic Swamp*, their sound was a hazy, psychedelic, super-lo-fi folk. Fans waded through the murk and fuzz to find sweetly composed, slyly winking sing-alongs. With more albums came a sonic crispness, peaking with 2010's tight, playful *Shame, Shame*. Now, 15 years after Dr. Dog seemed to crawl out of a basement studio, the Philadelphia sextet are swimming back to recover their lost relic.

2016's *Psychedelic Swamp* features pumped-up, dusted-off versions of the songs from their debut. The web of multi-tracked vocals is gone; the washed-out, often-warped piano and guitars are history. They've emboldened the *Psychedelic* and downplayed the *Swamp* to create a brand new album. "Golden Hind" gets things off to a paisley scented start, with its deliciously lazy, wobbling guitar and former guitarist **Doug O'Donnell** rejoining the gang on vocals after a decade away. "Ever-changing day, written on my face," he croons, a veritable tagline for the album.

The *Swamp* starts grooving with "Dead Record Player," complete with sunny group vocals and a doo-wop rhythm. The once shambling "Engineer Says" is now a slinky, lurching funk with clattering piano and jagged guitar, better for a loud stereo than expensive headphones. And new tune "Bring My Baby Back" is one of Dr. Dog's best, and most quotable, fitting in with the older gems seamlessly. "Fate is hilarious...does what he wants, swinging drunk and unhinged from the rafters, dragging his tail through the swamp," calls co-frontman **Toby Leaman** over bouncing percussion and piano that seem to laugh along with him.

So, is the *Swamp* a "reunion tour" type of retreat, or a worthwhile artistic endeavor? Check out newly energized jams like the twirling "Badvertise" or the cleaned-up loveliness of "In Love," and the answer is clear. With this new *Swamp*, Dr. Dog has reclaimed a superfan-only "lost recording," polished it and emerged with their best album in six years. The guys revisit these catchy, quirky tunes with the same expert eyes that have made them among the top psychedelic-pop purveyors of the last decade. With an infectious excitement, Dr. Dog presents us with delirious fun that you don't need a flashlight to find.

Justin Jacobs

Graham Nash

This Path Tonight BLUE CASTLE

Graham Nash has one of the most recognizable voices in pop music, a slightly gruff tenor that draws you into the worlds that his words create. On *This Path Tonight*, the first record of original new tunes he's made in 14 years, his voice is in fine shape, retaining the warmth and confessional sincerity that makes his vocals so appealing. Nash and guitarist/producer **Shane Fontayne** composed the tunes on this album in a month-long creative frenzy and recorded them in an intense eight-day session. The grim black-and-white photo on the cover echoes the somber tone of an album full of reflections on the meaning of life and death. The title track is a moody rocker that reminds us that love is the only thing that can get us through the darkness, be it metaphorical or actual. The subtle percussion of **Jay Bellerose** and **Patrick Warren**'s haunting piano support Nash's mournful vocals on "Myself at Last" and "Beneath the Waves," songs that ponder the unanswerable questions that plague us all in those sleepless hours before dawn. "Back Home" and "Encore" close the album on a solemn note, the first greeting death as an old friend, and the other likening life to a concert and wondering what will happen after the final song is over. ***J. Poet***

White Denim

Stiff DOWNTOWN

As expected, **White Denim** bust out of the gates on their latest album, *Stiff*. The opening track, "Had 2 Know (Personal)," kicks off with a frenetic and unquenchable guitar-and-drum riff that gives way to a smooth but only slightly less energetic classic-rock-inspired tune, setting the tone for this gasoline fire of a record. The nine-track collection doesn't waste time with filler songs, instead taking listeners on a riff-packed, dance-party rollercoaster. Barnburners like "Holda You (I'm Psycho)" display the newly reconfigured Austin quartet's tight double-guitar attack, only letting up during the latter half of the record with the soulful "Take It Easy (Ever After Lasting Love)" and the percussive, Curtis Mayfield-falsetto groove of "(I'm the One) Big Big Fun." As is apparent from the song titles, White Denim don't seem to take themselves too seriously, but it's impossible to deny the seriousness of their talent. After taking things back up a notch with the halting rocker "Mirrored in Reverse," the Texas boys throw in a bit of a curveball for the finale with the prog-jazz and R&B-flavored "Thank You," which plays them off on a velvety, sweet note. ***Matt Inman***

Ty Segall

Emotional Mugger DRAG CITY

A lot of ink gets spilled about **Ty Segall**'s proclivity for churning out whatever comes into his head and making an album out of it—sometimes two or three a year, including his side projects. The thing is, they all tend to be *really good*; for someone so committed to pure output, Segall hasn't lost the raw innocence and wacky headspace that elevated his 2008 self-titled debut to garage-classic status. In fact, *Emotional Mugger*, in fact, retains all the jagged rough edges, while coming across as a glam tribute (specifically to Marc Bolan) bent and braided through all manner of acid-rock lenses. "Like a bag of candy, I'll give you pleasure," he sings saucily on the first half of the title track (paired with the well-sequined "Leopard Priestess"). He's doing his level best to conjure the androgynous time when bodysuits clashed with platform boots, overdriven guitars sounded like synths, and muscle cars tore up the road in a slow-motion dance of kaleidoscopic sparks. This is music that's as visually suggestive as it is sonically arresting—pretty damn impressive for a guy who could just as easily have wound up toting a surfboard in his native Laguna Beach before the Bay Area claimed him as its own. ***Bill Murphy***

Animal Collective

Painting With DOMINO

For their 11th LP, **Animal Collective** aimed for their version of the Ramones. But how many classic punk albums feature samples of *Golden Girls* dialogue? Indeed, the psych-pop wanderers have filtered that mantra through their own kooky lens: shorter tunes, less reverb, scaling back the ambient interludes for a set of revved-up LSD nursery rhymes. Working as a trio (without on-off guitarist Deakin, who consistently brings a visceral edge to their work), the group relies heavily on echoing, call-and-response vocals and analog synthesizers—a fizzier, more cartoonish take on their 2009 epic *Merriweather Post Pavilion*. Lead single "FloriDada" harnesses that approach for maximum immediacy, as **Avey Tare** and **Panda Bear** ping-pong their voices over pounding tom-toms into a squirmy, childlike hook. But the album's hit-it-and-quit-it nature has its drawbacks: Some of the briefer, sparser cuts ("Vertical," "The Burglars") punch you and then flee the scene before you can sketch out a profile. As usual, Animal Collective intrigue most on *Painting With* when the songs probe into new territory, like the bass-heavy electronics of "Bagels in Kiev" or the abrupt sax and piano interjections on "Lying in the Grass." ***Ryan Reed***

Moon Taxi

Daybreaker 12 SOUTH

After breaking out of the jam-festival space with 2013's *Mountains Beaches Cities*, which yielded a commercial deal with BMW, **Moon Taxi** don't waste any time in getting back to that anthemic, television-ready sound in the opening seconds of *Daybreaker*. The lead track, "Year Zero," kicks into gear with a thick organ and an off-the-bat chorused vocal line that showcases the Nashville group's ability to craft a hook. Like most of their recent output, *Daybreaker* is characterized by the strong lead vocals of **Trevor Terndrup**, along with a stadium-like production that lifts the frontman up on a cloud of earnestness. The guitar sounds are varied and inspired throughout, from the plonky riffs of "Savannah" to the warm, spacey vibe of "Always" to the sharp distortion and searing solo of album standout "Red Hot Lights." Terndrup's voice is at its best when he is able to let his power show, as he does on tracks like "Domino" and the aforementioned "Lights," but he can make a softer approach work in his favor as well, especially in verses, like in the driving, bouncy pop of "Make Your Mind Up," which also boasts a glorious sax solo straight out of the '80s. ***Matt Inman***

Bloc Party

M. Ward

More Rain MERGE

It's been four years since **Matthew Ward**'s last solo LP, but he's seemingly spent that time whittling on his front porch. *More Rain*, his eighth album, begins with a one-minute rainstorm sample, wind chimes rattling in the background. It's a breezy, appropriate reintroduction: Though the album features a parade of guest musicians—**Neko Case**, **k.d. lang**, erstwhile R.E.M. guitarist **Peter Buck**—it's some of his most intimate work in years. "Pirate Dial" is the apex of Ward's career, summarizing his assorted musical strengths: the ramshackle acoustic strum, the minimal sunshine-pop flourishes of synth and electric guitar, that trademark velvety rasp coated in molasses and rubbed with sandpaper. Ward's recent albums and collaborative projects (She & Him, Monsters of Folk) have expanded his reach beyond the requisite folk, blues and Americana. *More Rain* follows suit, albeit tranquilly: "Confession" sounds like Joy Division shacked up with Paul Simon, and "Slow Driving Man" is an atmospheric soft-rock epic highlighted by dissonant strings. But even at his most ambitious, Ward never pushes the dynamics or tempo too far. He mostly just sounds content, as if he stumbled into the studio after a well-earned rainy day catnap. ***Ryan Reed***

Bloc Party

Hymns VAGRANT

For a band that was all but left for dead just a year ago (founding drummer Matt Tong quit in 2013 and bassist Gordon Moakes followed in early 2015), **Bloc Party** has bounced back with a feistiness—much of it emanating from frontman **Kele Okereke**—that erases any doubt about whether the creative juices had dried up. Simply put, the group's fifth album is a masterstroke of heady, atmospheric rock, with a well-buffed patina of the electro-goth textures that punctuated their early albums and made them such a hot draw on the U.K. club scene. Okereke seethes with palpable defiance on "Only He Can Heal Me," as he laments the Camus-like absurdity of existence ("Every day feels like a hustle/every day I'm saving face"), and he sounds resolutely confessional on the seductive "My True Name," with guitarist **Russell Lissack** laying down artfully clean-picked riffs over a bed of droning synths. New bandmates **Justin Harris** (bass) and **Louise Bartle** (drums) throw sparks throughout (especially on the bent disco-dubstepper "The Love Within" and the dry, Costello-ish "Into the Earth"), but *Hymns* doesn't pivot so much on what's fresh as on what's familiar, with Okereke vibrating, and vibe-ing, at the center of it all. ***Bill Murphy***

Raffi

Owl Singalong ROUNDER

For as long as he was renowned for his staunch political activism as the fearless father of protest folk, the late, great Pete Seeger is equally lauded for his essential contributions to the world of children's music. There isn't a boy or girl in America who hasn't sung at least one of his songs in preschool or day care. And perhaps no other artist has been more cognizant of the sweet simplicity of Seeger's musical way with kids than **Raffi Cavoukian**. It's been 40 years since the Cairo-born, Toronto-bred troubadour recorded his debut family friendly album, *Singable Songs for the Very Young*, in the basement studio of a green Daniel Lanois. Now, after a 12-year hiatus, which ended in 2014 with the release of *Love Bug*, Raffi is back in full swing with perhaps his most poignant LP to date. This is the first album Raffi has envisioned since Seeger's passing, and you can hear his influence all over this 16-song set. New originals, like "Green Dream" and "See The Moon," still offer insight into such politically charged topics as the environment and immigration, conveying a forgotten sense of innocence and wonder. He also covers two tunes made famous during Seeger's renowned children's concerts in his hopeful, tender reading of the David Mallett number "Garden Song" and "Abiyoyo," a South African folk tale about a boy who saves his town from a giant with his ukulele that old Pete incorporated into his kiddie shows for decades. At times, he sings in French and Spanish, as well as offering silly variations of such age-old faves as the

"Hokey Pokey" and the "Wheels on the Bus," retrofitted with lions and dogs to keep the tots' attention through the course of *Owl*'s 36-minute length. This is a record not only for new "Belugas," but also for those who grew up on Raffi and are concerned for their children's future. But as this staunch children's advocate has been doing for 40 years now, Raffi's warm, understanded voice still has the ability it make it all seem OK in the often dark social media age. ***Ron Hart***

The Infamous Stringdusters
Ladies & Gentlemen
COMPASS

However you spin it, **The Infamous Stringdusters** are a bluegrass band at heart, although their sixth album, *Ladies & Gentlemen*, takes some sonic liberties. The 12 tracks also feature an all-star lineup of female musicians, including **Joan Osborne**, **Lee Ann Womack** and **Sarah Jarosz**, and save for some harmonies, their voices are the only ones you'll hear. So, is it still a Stringdusters album? Despite the quintet's instrumental signature, not everyone will agree. Some tunes easily fit the band's classic sound, such as "Ladders in the Sky," with bluegrass vocalist **Claire Lynch**, "See How Far You've Come," featuring **Sara Watkins**, and **Aoife O'Donovan**'s "Run To Heaven." In some instances—"Coming Back to You," with **Mary Chapin Carpenter**'s deep croon, or the lighthearted "Rock and Roll," with **Abigail Washburn**'s old-timey stylings—the legends make the song. Elsewhere, **Jennifer Hartswick** adds some tasty trumpet to the instrumental "Hazosphere," and **Joss Stone** shines a light on the band's rarely seen soulful side during "Have A Little Faith." The only downside to such an ambitious assemblage may be the limits of replicating it live, though **Nicki Bluhm** ("Still The One") and Della Mae's **Celia Woodsmith** ("Old Whiskey Bottle") have agreed to join the band on tour. ***Kiran Herbert***

American Babies
An Epic Battle Between Light & Dark ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Tom Hamilton, the main force behind **American Babies**, describes his latest record as a discussion of both what it is like to experience depression and what it takes to maintain hope while in the midst of it—issues with which he has personal experience. "A lot of this record is how we've dealt with things," he says, referring to himself and his musical collaborator **Peter Tramo**, who helped him craft the album. "How I, in spite of having those times that are just the worst, am still pushing through and making a life happen regardless." Even without its ominous title, *An Epic Battle Between Light & Dark* is undoubtedly a heavy record. Tracks like the introspective waltz "Alone in the House" and the expansive, triumphant "Bring It in Close" show a deep desire to understand and console, despite an almost unbearable weight. However, it never feels heavy-handed, and there are even moments of musical levity, as in the horn-fueled rapture of the beginning and end of "Fever Dreams." Hamilton prefers to go deep here, though, as encapsulated in "Oh Darling," whose second half jarringly falls into a swampy guitar jam that aptly sounds like an epic battle raging inside the mind. ***Matt Inman***

Lucius
Good Grief MOM + POP

Following the acclaim that greeted their 2013 debut *Wildewoman*, **Lucius** faced a daunting task in attempting to match that high bar with their sophomore set. It seemed that they had been instantly elevated to some upper tier and described with the same reverence that's generally accorded to those with far fuller résumés. Fortunately, the unabashed exuberance and air of cacophony demonstrated the first time around surfaces yet again on *Good Grief*, an ideal example of a delivery that exceeds the expectations that come courtesy of its dual provocateurs, **Jess Wolfe** and **Holly Laessig**. Each is a formidable vocalist and, together, they create an imposing presence. On songs like "Something About You," "Almost Makes Me Wish for Rain" and "Truce" they convey a sense of absolute urgency, as if they're women possessed. Desire and desperation are blended in equal measure, and when they wail, "I can be the one that's going insane" on the hyper descriptive "Gone Insane," it doesn't seem like such a stretch. "Madness" conveys many of the same sentiments—albeit it with some restraint—and, indeed, with the possible exception of closing track "Dusty Trails," the entire album basks in a kind of dire delirium. This is music with an irrepressible edge. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Miike Snow
iii ATLANTIC

Miike Snow reimagine their electro-pop sound on *iii*, the Swedish group's third full-length and follow-up to 2012's *Happy to You*. Where the last album meandered and occasionally felt too introspective, here, Miike Snow lighten their melodies, adding a pop buoyancy to the hooks and beats—somewhat similarly to their work on their self-titled 2009 debut. Single "Genghis Khan" has a groovy jaunt in its step and a catchy precision to its chorus, reminding you that the band members have recently worked as songwriters and producers for artists like Bruno Mars. **Charli XCX** joins the game on "For U," her voice a little too

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Reviews

obscured by synth and distortion, and **Run The Jewels** appear on a funky, hip-hop remix of "Heart Is Full" to close the album. The band lingers on moody ambience occasionally, like on overly mopey "I Feel the Weight," but their best work is in the shiny pop numbers. It's there that the musicians add some much-needed glimmer to the current Hot 100 landscape. *Emily Zemler*

Glenn Kotche & Sō Percussion

Drumkit Quartets CANTALOUPE

Glenn Kotche and **Sō Percussion**'s new collaborative *Drumkit Quartets* has the opposite of a clever name, though the album doesn't suffer for it. And while hearing Wilco's legendary avant-drummer compose music for four drum kits would probably be quite compelling, it's also wise to remember that Kotche's sprawling set-up in Wilco is one of the few in the modern rock biz to rival elder skinbashers like the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart or Rush's Neil Peart. Instead, *Drumkit Quartets* comes tapping in warm electronic-treated tones ("Drumkit Quartet #3, Mt 2"), kit-to-crickets disintegrations that never lose their rhythmic cool ("Drumkit Quartet #6") and the occasional bell cascade ("Drumkit Quartet #3, Mt. 3"). Traditionally kinetic showoff moves get buried amid experiments including, most intriguingly, percussion parts rendered as tapped-out laptop typing, laughter, silence and other noises (or absence thereof) on "Drumkit Quartet #50." The album reaches its apex with the closing "Drumkit Quartet #51 (Chicago Realization)," where a lush hum makes a bed as marimbas clatter atop one another like a steady, pleasant, tuned rain on the roof. Other electronic ghosts arrive and depart, but the marimbas are insistent. Sometimes, percussion is all you need. *Jesse Jarnow*

Battleme

Habitual Love Songs

EL CAMINO

Battleme is the solo project of Portland, Ore.-based musician **Matt Drenik**, who used to front hard-rockers Lions and who has been around the scene long enough to develop a certain confidence in what he does—which, as *Habitual Love Songs* displays, is pretty much anything he wants. This ethos has landed several of his songs on television hit *Sons of Anarchy*, a show that nicely mirrors Battleme's melding of heart and grit. "Head Up" might be the most telling of these tracks, starting as a meditative, piano-driven ballad, morphing into a distorted jam, then jumping right into a bravado-filled, straightforward rock anthem. "It's rock-and-roll, man," Drenik repeats, "Don't you know us?" More people probably *should* know him, in fact, because from the driving riff and disaffected vocals of "Shake Shake" to the jangly, Wilco-esque country sheen of "Back To You," Battleme delivers something for everyone. *Matt Inman*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Nashville meets Negril. Country music was an important ingredient in the subliminal sauce that added emotional depth to the golden age of reggae. And no one makes the connection clearer, strangely enough, than **Jeb Loy Nichols**, a blue-eyed soul-stirrer raised in the American South. Following some remarkable country-dub albums with his band **Fellow Travellers**, and a solo career waiting to be rediscovered, Nichols circles back around with *Long Time Traveller* (On-U), a resequenced and remastered double-CD version of a small 2010 Japanese release. Producer **Adrian Sherwood** and his crack reggae crew are Nichols' co-conspirators on an album that includes future C&R classics like "To Be Rich (Should Be a Crime)" and "Lonely King of the Country."

Dancing to the darkness. Country and reggae is forever, but country and cumbia—particularly the psychedelic Amazonian version known as chichi—is *now*, baby. **XIXA**'s inventive and unsettling new *Bloodline* (Barbès) sounds like the soundtrack to a Quentin Tarantino film-noir adaptation of a Cormac McCarthy novel. Part of an unlikely (yet probably inevitable) cumbia revival in Tucson, XIXA blends the psych-indie sounds of bands like Calexico and the Meat Puppets with the Latin rhythms imbued in their cultural DNA. XIXA's debut ranges from the cinematic dread of "Bloodline" and "Vampiro" to the experimental old-school cumbia of "Nena Linda."

Tolstoy, the musical. Mumford, or perhaps one of his sons, spiels convincingly about mankind's addiction to armed conflict in "War," the penultimate song on longtime Senegalese star **Baaba Maal**'s energetic and electrified *The Traveller* (+180). The subsequent "Peace," however, inverts the message with the same words and different music. The Very Best's **Johan Hugo** worked with Maal on this intermittently incendiary fusion of tough West African beats and ye olde electro. It doesn't always work, but Maal gives it his all, often disappearing into the info-overloaded fabric. Music very much of its time, in other words.

Sok it to me. Former home to the now-extinct dodo, the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius turns out to have been a surprising hotbed of sometimes wild-eyed Afro-rock during the 1970s, as demonstrated on *Soul Sok Séga* (Strut). A rare comp where you wish each track linked to much more of the same, *Soul Sok Séga* begins with **Ti L'Afrique**'s title track, a raw, soulful takeoff on the island's funky, folky "séga" sound (named for a goat-skin drum). Don't confuse it with **Cyril Labonne**'s "Pop Soul Séga," whose hiccupping vocal and jaunty beat suggest some uncharted, mutant New Orleans R&B groove. And Bollywood meets Madagascar in **Claudio Veeraragoo**'s "Bhai Aboo," a brilliantly hybrid peppered with cheesy Mexican-accented laughter.

Curdled Cream. Everyone's favorite blood-sucking Bali demon queen, **Rangda** is also the name of a mutant power trio featuring crypto-legendary guitarists **Sir Richard Bishop** and **Ben Chasny**. Their third album, *The Heretic's Bargain* (Drag City), kicks off with "To Melt the Moon," a taste of Turkish folk-prog in taut 10/4 time. What's left is looser—from the lest-we-forget ode to "Spiro Agnew" to the climactic coup de grâce, a 20-minute structured improvisation called "Mondays Are Free at the Hermetic Museum."

Bump

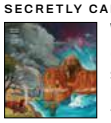
Broken Fix SELF-RELEASED

Bump are a relatively new trio consisting of latter-day Ominous Seapods guitarist **Todd Pasternack**, bassist **Angela Ford** and drummer **Gregory Nash**. Despite having been together for just a little over a year at this point, the three mesh well on their debut album, *Broken Fix*, bringing a wealth of experience from other bands to create a cohesive unit that excels in both straightforward songwriting and loose improvisation. And it's really in the latter where Bump shine. Listeners get their first taste of the this trio's jamband potential with "Wrecking Ball," a pop ballad voiced by Ford that gives way to a vocal chant and revs up to a percussively funky prog jam. Tight harmonies and soft melodies abound on the record, as in "How Could You Go So Low," which features a feather-light, three-part harmony and a sparse, slow-burn guitar solo break that showcases Bump's ability to settle into a hypnotizing, smooth groove. *Matt Inman*

Damien Jurado

Visions of Us on the Land

SECRETLY CANADIAN



With *Visions of Us on the Land*, Seattle singer-songwriter **Damien Jurado** is now 14 albums deep into a long career. In a climate full of "next big things," Jurado is a perennial safe bet—he's been recording lovely, understated, vaguely psychedelic folk rock for nearly two decades. But the collaboration he launched with producer and The Shins/The Arcs member **Richard Swift** on 2010's

Saint Bartlett pumped a new, ragged energy into Jurado's music, and it's never been as fruitful as it is on *Visions of Us on the Land*. The album's title is telling—Jurado approaches these 17 songs as if he's looking toward the beach from a tiny boat on lapping waves, the figures he sees on land are fuzzy and far off, and his voice is full of longing to paddle back to shore. "I lost my mind, so I stepped out for a time," he sings on "QACHINA." "Went for a walk on a long road to unwind. I met myself there, saying 'Go home.'" Jurado's closest contemporary on *Visions of Us* is Nick Drake, though his songs come wrapped in far more sonic layers. These are visions of sadness and love, from a far-off place. ***Justin Jacobs***

Lissie

My Wild West

LIONBOY/THIRTY TIGERS

Lissie Maurus may be on her third LP, but the Illinois native's vocals still carry the shocking punch of a gale-force wind, and to hear her tear into the chorus of "Sun Keeps Risin'" or "Daughters" is to hear her for the first time—even if you've been a fan since her humble, acoustic beginnings nearly a decade ago. Subsequent albums layered heavy guitars around her best instrument, but with *My Wild West*, she's stripped things down to bare-bones once again and lets her voice reign supreme. The vibe throughout is dusty and lonesome, but hopeful. On tracks like "Hero," guitars whip around her Stevie-Nicks-like fairy-dust vocals: "Play the part of the blushing bride, tame the horse and take it for a ride... I want my 40 acres in the sun." Lissie's songwriting has been stronger on previous efforts, but she delivers enough classic-rock magic here to tune in. ***Justin Jacobs***

Conrad Keely

Original Machines SUPERBALL/SONY

With Austin noisemakers ...And You Will Know Us By the Trail of Dead, **Conrad Keely** revels in a vitalizing prog-punk din. But he tosses out the rulebook on his debut solo LP, *Original Machines*, experimenting with electronica, space-jazz, psych-pop and other unexpected styles. Keely's compositional process began on his iPad's GarageBand app, and it shows: There's an offhand charm to the programmed bass and drum elements—and a breezy immediacy to the material, with most of these 24 quick-firing cuts falling shy of three minutes. Where Trail of Dead's emotional upheaval can often be exhausting, *Original Machines* is often deliberately playful—see the Latin piano that decorates ballad "Trust the Knowledge," the funky congas of jangle-pop single "Warm Insurrection," or the stacked vocal harmonies and marimba that propel art-pop centerpiece "Rays of the Absolute." Keely sounds invigorated, exploring dimensions that would play against the explosive strengths of his main band. Whether it's a lark or the start of an escapist solo career, *Original Machines* showcases his underrated skill as a songwriter and sonic craftsman. ***Ryan Reed***

Dr. Dan Matrazzo & The Looters

Dr. Dan Matrazzo & The Looters

VERMILLION SOUND

Though he's a seasoned keyboardist skilled in an ample array of genres from rock, jazz and jam to fusion, funk and classical, **Dr. Dan Matrazzo** isn't exactly a household name. That's because, thus far, he's laregly existed in the shadows of his famous collaborators, supporting the Allman Brothers, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Widespread Panic, Gov't Mule, Taj Mahal, Blues Traveler, Col. Bruce Hampton & The Aquarium Rescue Unit. His own recordings have been relatively rare, too, making this new entry a welcome occasion to hear him on his own. Paired with **The Looters**, Matrazzo is given ample opportunity to stretch out through extended instrumentals and a free-flowing musical mix that reflects his improvisational chops well. (The eponymous album is billed as something of a conceptual sequel to his work on the new Sco-Mule archival release.) While none of the songs are especially noteworthy, other than for the fact that they offer a showcase for the band's dexterity, they do allow Matrazzo and his mates to flex their muscles, while putting the focus on funk and fusion. Song titles like "Pimpin' Ain't Easy" and "Spidey on Crack" indicate the mindset, but a sizzling variation on "Minor Third from the Sun" shows that there is ample skill in much of what the good doctor is prescribing. ***Lee Zimmerman***

She Is We

War VANGUARD

After He Is We dissolved, **Rachael Taylor** was diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis, a bone condition that makes moving difficult, and navigated some troubling times. Her physical and personal trials inform the songs on *War*, a visceral collection that abandons the innocent sound of her former band. Swelling waves of synthesizers pull you into Taylor's emotional turmoil, before she sets you free with the redemptive promise of true love. Her powerful vocals slip into the shadowy recesses of the psyche on "Monster," a ballad that explores the alienation of a 19 year old who feels monstrously out of place in her world, and "War," a harrowing description of a self-destructive affair with the telling line: "You became my suicide." "Better Now" celebrates the healing power of a good relationship, with Taylor's buoyant

1 Andrew St. James

"Sorry About Tomorrow"
From the album *Sorry About Tomorrow*
Island Jar Records

San Francisco native Andrew St. James weaves a millennial perspective with classic storytelling and hints of old-world narcissism to paint an evocative and compelling picture. Both 2013's *Doldrums* and 2014's *The Shakes* showcase the breadth of his folk influences and were lauded by *Paste, Daytrotter, USA Today, Entertainment Weekly* and *Culture Collide*. St. James has spent the past year playing out with the likes of Cold War Kids, Lou Barlow, Nick Waterhouse and Two Gallants, and releasing new one-off singles, while preparing for his next full-length.

www.andrewstjames.com

2 Bump

"Wrecking Ball"
From the album *Broken Fix*
Self-released

No strangers to writing, recording and touring, Bump's members include Todd Pasternack (Ominous Seapods, Marlow), Angela Ford (Marlow, Lo Faber Band) and Gregory Nash (Ten Year Vamp, Sirsy). With their first-year anniversary now behind them, the powerful songwriting trio brings nine original songs to the public with debut release *Broken Fix*. The album is available on their website, iTunes, Amazon and Spotify.

www.bumpband.net

3 Gowanus

"Prestige Worldwide"
From the album *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*
Self-released

Gowanus is a Brooklyn-based quartet that combines digital layers with traditional analog instrumentation and elaborate song structures. *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead,* the band's recently released sophomore album, is heavily influenced by their jam and post-rock roots and features a range of musical styles that highlight the band's hard-hitting, cinematic sound.

www.gowanusband.com

4 Twiddle

"Dusk Till Dawn"
From the album *PLUMP: Chapter One*
JamFlow Records

Twiddle is on the brink of something big, and the band's truly eclectic repertoire is more than partially responsible for that. *PLUMP*'s "Dusk Till Dawn" boasts refreshing pedal-steel guitar, percussionist Brook Jordan's warm vocals and an invigorating message. Many are taking notice as this Vermont quartet gains legitimate momentum.

www.twiddlemusic.com

5 Robert Norris

"The Way We Used to Be"
From the album *New Old Songs*
Bigcooncat Records

I'm a singer and a songwriter and I grew up in a golden era of music. Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Wonder are my primary songwriting influences. My favorite singers sang in big bands almost 100 years ago. That's why I'm calling it "Robert Norris – *New Old Songs*."

www.reverbnation.com/robertnorrismusic

6 Robert Norris

"Still Life Goes On"
From the album *New Old Songs*
Bigcooncat Records

www.reverbnation.com/robertnorrismusic

7 The Silvers

"No More (This Time I Mean It)"
From the album *After the Laughter*
Genterine Records

Bassist and vocalist Mick Orton with guitarists Tom Kelley, Ricky Zero and drummer Glenn Stone are The Silvers! January 2015 showcased their first CD single and animated video, "Running Away"/"Nothing Really Matters." In March 2016, they will release their album *After the Laughter* and animated video of "No More."

www.thesilversmusic.com

8 Jet Noir

"Warriors Blood"
From the album *Warriors Blood*
Self-released

Jet Noir is a progressive, goth singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and alternative model based in London. She is represented by Deadfall Artist/Band Management (deadfallmanagement@gmail.com). Bookings can be made through Dark Independent Bookings: pieter@darkindependentbookings.com and damian@darkindependentbookings.com.

www.facebook.com/TheJetNoir

9 Charley Raiff

"Tell Me"
From the album *In Persona*
Self-released

Young pianist and singer-songwriter Charley Raiff recorded his debut original album, *In Persona* at New York City's legendary Avatar Studios with the aid of industry veteran Dae Bennett. A fresh voice on the scene, Raiff's sound offers improvisational spirit and unprecedented creative vision—an eclectic artist confirmed as a major talent on the rise.

www.charleyraiff.com

10 Nocturnal Rifts

"Beyond"
From the album *Beyond*
Self-released

Nocturnal Rifts is the Washington, D.C.-based indie-rock project of Hillel Smith. The project, which was founded in 2013, incorporates different styles ranging from post punk, shoegaze, dream pop, ambient and synth pop, to British rock. Characterized by reflective, guitar-driven melodies and hazy atmospheric textures, Nocturnal Rifts is committed to creating music that is both nostalgic and imaginative.

www.reverbnation.com/nocturnalrifts

11 Editor's Pick: M. Ward

"Confession"
From the album *More Rain*
Merge Records

M. Ward returns with his eighth solo album, *More Rain* (released on March 4 via Merge Records). In addition to his solo albums, Ward has released five LPs with Zooey Deschanel as She & Him and a 2009 collaborative album with My Morning Jacket's Jim James and Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis under the moniker Monsters of Folk. He is an accomplished producer, handling those duties for Mavis Staples, Jenny Lewis and Carlos Forster, as well as his own projects.

www.mergerecords.com

12 JamOFF! Winner: Daytime Nightlife

"Sale Tactics"
From the album *Daytime Nightlife*
Self-released

Armed with musical weapons of mass "construction," California indie/alternative band "Daytime Nightlife" is fighting fear and negativity with their debut self-titled album. The 13-track CD was recorded, mixed and mastered entirely by members Mark and Gary Malec, and Matt Tucci. Download the track for free on our website.

www.daytimenightlife.com

harmony vocals, while "Lead the Fight On" closes the record with a jubilant ode to the liberating power of true love. *J. Poet*

The 1975

I like it when you sleep, for you are so beautiful yet so unaware of it

DIRTY HIT/INTERSCOPE

Once you get past the curious tone of the title of **The 1975**'s sophomore album, another question arises: Where does the hype for this band come from? It certainly can't originate from the songs here, which are mediocre at best. There's little emotion or artistry from the musicians, even as they try to infuse tracks like gospel ballad "If I Believe You" with a bluesy croon. Single "Love Me" tries for brash rock-and-roll, but ends up with a dull mid-tempo effort that feels both derivative and requisite, as if the band felt they needed to write a swaggering track and this is what came out. The group's self-titled 2013 debut was catchy, especially hit songs like "The City," but this is a step back rather than the experimental evolution they seem to be aiming for. It's important to recognize what sort of band you are—and where that identity can flex itself or shift in tenor. The 1975 are a decent rock band with a lively show, but whoever they are trying to be here isn't working. *Emily Zemler*

SIMO

Let Love Show the Way MASCOT

It's the stuff of legend: A young guitarist drops out of high school and leaves the bluesy lights of Chicago behind him to seek his fortune. He wanders into Nashville and somehow lands the coveted—and grueling—lead guitar seat in The Don Kelley Band, a wildly popular local outfit that just might work harder than James Brown ever did. A few years later, he emerges as the best axe-slinger in Music City, founds his own power trio, and starts setting clubs on fire with boogie-fried blues-rock that recalls the Allman Brothers, Cream, Free and Humble Pie. *Let Love Show the Way* is 29-year-old **JD Simo**'s busting-out party, and it couldn't come at a riper time. Playing none other than Duane Allman's original Les Paul Goldtop guitar (and with the band set up in the Allmans' Big House in Macon, Ga.), Simo rips through "Stranger Blues," "I Lied" and the 10-minute epic, exploratory "I'd Rather Die In Vain" with something akin to a spiritual force. He can sing, he can shred and he's probably this generation's next guitar hero. *Bill Murphy*

Soul Asylum

Change of Fortune EONE

On again, off again and then again back on, **Soul Asylum** have pursued an erratic course of late, due to leader **Dave Pirner**'s wandering muse, and, sadly, the death of longtime bassist Karl Mueller in 2005. Consequently, their output has been relatively sparse over the past decade. While like-minded outfits such as Pearl Jam have achieved cultural status, Soul Asylum are occasionally considered little more than a footnote to the alt-rock era, denying them the distinction they deserve. Arriving four years after the aptly dubbed *Delayed Reaction*, *Change of Fortune* offers the very real possibility that Soul Asylum might finally reap the good luck indicated in the title. Appropriately, too, it's a throwback to their earlier era, boasting songs that recall their pivotal big breakthrough, *Grave Dancer's Union*—the riveting and relentless "Supersonic" and "Doomsday," the equally energized "When I See You" and "Don't Bother Me". Yet, there are also obvious hints of their early punk posture (the raging "Can't Help It" and a tumultuous "Make It Real"). Mostly, it shows a band still at the peak of their prowess, with clear potential for garnering whatever fortunes the future may hold. *Lee Zimmerman*

Loretta Lynn

Full Circle SONY LEGACY

On her first album in 12 years, **Loretta Lynn**, and producers **John Carter Cash** and **Patsy Lynn Russell**, opt for a stripped-down sound that's as much Americana as it is country. She covers the entire range of country music, from folk ballads like "Black Jack David" to her '60s hits "Fist City" and "Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven." At 83, Lynn still has most of her range and serves up a few surprises, adding some wordless gospel moaning to the outro of "In the Pines," knocking out some impressive high notes on the pop standard "Secret Love" and playing with her phrasing on "Always on My Mind." (The latter tune adds little melismas to the end of her vocal lines.) **Elvis Costello** guests on "Everything It Takes," but his harmonies are lost in the mix. **Willie Nelson** fares better on "Lay Me Down," blending his voice with Lynn's to address mortality with a sense of graceful acceptance. The album opener is "Whispering Sea," the first song Lynn ever wrote. In a spoken intro, she recalls writing 12 songs in two days for a recording session. It would have been great if they'd gotten her take on "Fist City" and her other hits, too, but the music speaks for itself. *J. Poet*

Kelley Stoltz

In Triangle Time CASTLE FACE

Like Robert Pollard of Guided By Voices, **Kelley Stoltz** is an Anglophile, and he's internalized the sound and aesthetic of The Kinks, the Move and a lot of other music. On previous releases, the San Francisco-based Stoltz evoked more of the sublime harmonies of The Beatles and The Beach Boys, but he's taken a turn toward nicely ragged psychedelia here. "Wobbly" has a woozy, squished guitar part, with a sound that approximates the title. "Pyramid of Time" suggests "Set The Controls"-era Pink Floyd but doesn't give in to full-on chaos and abandon. "Litter Love" has the mechanistic minimalist rhythmic underpinnings of Krautrock, with Gary Numan-ish robo-vocals and a glint of corresponding android utopianism. There may be some kind of geometric high concept at work here, with the title track and songs that refer to "right angles"—it's hard to say. The most lovely song on the record might be the one that's the least like the rest, "Destroyers & Drones," with its sad piano, absurdist wordplay and Frippertronic-ish feedback guitar wash. *John Adamian*

DIIV

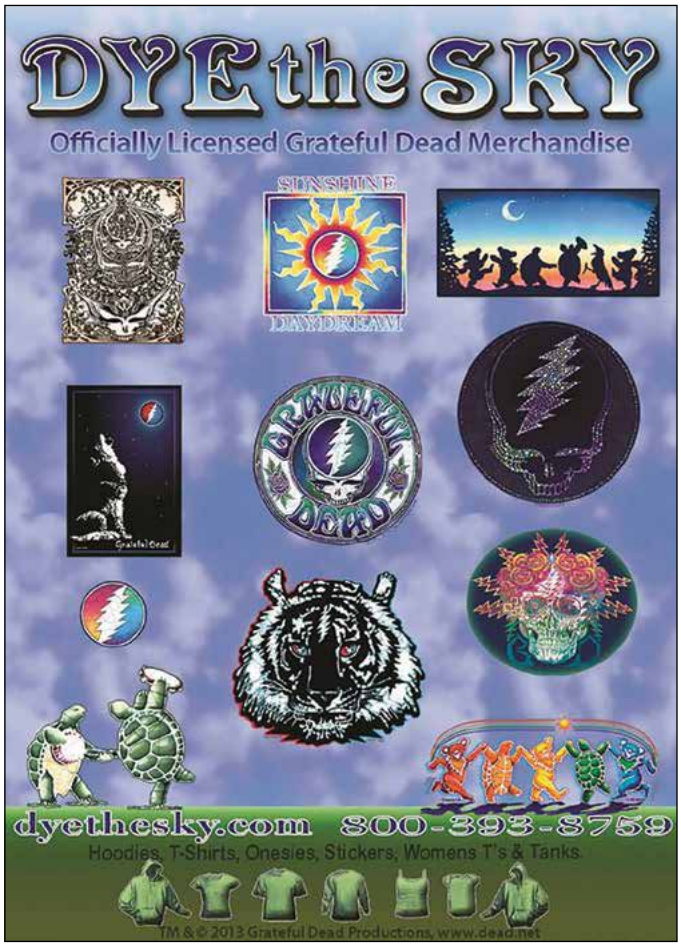
Is the Is Are CAPTURED TRACKS

Over the course of 17 tracks, **DIIV**'s sophomore effort, *Is the Is Are*, reveals a sense of depth and nuance, using subtlety and careful layering to achieve an eventual grandiose effect. From the hazy indie-pop of single "Under the Sun" to the moody shoegaze of "Valentine" to the buoyant spring of the title track, the band's songwriter and frontman **Zachary Cole Smith** opens up an ever-shifting, shimmering ambience that takes a journey from start to finish. The album, a follow-up to DIIV's 2012 debut, *Oshin*, places "Mire (Grant's Song)" at its center, a five-plus minute surge of aura and emotion that laces together waves of static-tinged guitars. It's an apt example of DIIV's evolution here—even if one track can't capture the intent of the entire album—and the song is a microcosm of how much the musicians use *Is the Is Are* to explore a vast expanse of tones without ever deviating from their signature. The album, in both length and content, feels as if its architects took work and thought to create it, thereby asking its listeners for the same consideration in return. It's a collection of songs that's worth that effort. *Emily Zemler*

Dr. Lonnie Smith

Evolution BLUE NOTE

The Hammond B3 magic of **Dr. Lonnie Smith** helped define the Blue Note sound of the 1960s and early '70s. In fact, Smith's version of Blood, Sweat & Tears' "Spinning Wheel" has been sampled in over 60 hip-hop songs, most notably by A Tribe Called Quest, who used it on both "Can I Kick It?" and "Buggin' Out." And in one of the tastiest moves he's made yet as president, **Don Was** has not only brought the good doctor back to Blue Note for the first time in 45 years, but he also produced the album. On *Evolution*, Was queues up a crisp, sharp sonic field similar to his work behind the boards on your favorite Was (Not Was) LP, as the turban-donning B3 guru whips up some of his most impassioned playing in years. Flanked by a stellar crew of modern musicians—guitarist **Jonathan Kreisberg**, reedist **John Ellis**, drummers **Joe Tyson** and **Johnathan Blake** and trumpeter **Maurice Brown** chief among them—Smith falls right back into that vintage Blue Note groove as if Richard Nixon was still in the White House on versions of Thelonious Monk's "Straight No Chaser" and Coltrane's variation on Rodgers & Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things." Elsewhere, he goes toe-to-toe with pianist **Robert Glasper**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the dharma bums
CHECK OUT THE DHARMA BUMS ON THE RELIX COMPILATION CD (IN THIS ISSUE). THE NEW ALBUM, "HYMNS TO BUDDHA" IS AVAILABLE ON ITUNES AND AT DHARMABUMS.ORG

Reviews

on opening track "Play It Back," while saxophonist **Joe Lovano**—who debuted on Smith's 1975 album *Afrodesia*—revisits the title cut of that record with the warmth of a reunion between old friends. *Evolution* is a good old-fashioned Blue Note boogaloo party and a most triumphant homecoming for one of the label's true OGs. ***Ron Hart***

Maritime

Magnetic Bodies/Maps Of Bones

DANGERBIRD

It's been four years since **Maritime** unveiled their last album, but when you listen to *Magnetic Bodies/Maps Of Bones*, it almost sounds like no time has passed. The group, which formed from the ashes of The Promise Ring back in the early '00s, is eternally reliable in their music, crafting solid, emotionally well-wrought songs that don't feel tethered to a specific scene or era. The music here isn't necessarily groundbreaking or notably exceptional, but it is amiable and well-written, hawking a sense of familiarity in its melodies. "Collar Bones" is instantly compelling, a shimmering indie-rock number, while "Satellite Love" is folksy and propulsive, reflecting the feeling of an intimate live show. There's a pleasure in consistency and it's a positive knowledge that a band like Maritime will always come back to you with every new album at least as good as their last. ***Emily Zemler***

Wolf Eyes

I Am a Problem: Mind in Pieces

THIRD MAN

It's been a quiet few years for **Wolf Eyes**, who've only put out (give or take) 17 new releases since 2013, mostly small-batch CD-Rs with a few 7-inches thrown in for good measure. *I Am a Problem: Mind in Pieces*, their first full-length for Jack White's Third Man Records, is akin to a major label signing for the long-running trio, who've built a deep discography spread across cassettes, compact discs and vinyl. Anchored by veteran noiseniks **Nate Young** and **John Olson**, with relative newcomer **Jim Baljo**, *I Am a Problem* finds Wolf Eyes making music that is shockingly inside by their standards. They create the occasional punk grinder ("Enemy Ladder") and stoner-doom jammer ("Twister Nightfall"), but mostly churn out song structures that fall well on the accessible side of Wolf Eyes' spectrum while remaining brain-twisting and macabre by most real-world human standards ("T.O.D.D.," "Cynthia Vortex aka Trip Memory Illness"). Threaded with obfuscated melodies and free improv, perhaps appealing to those fond of Animal Collective's fever dreams, *I Am a Problem* is a good place to enter. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Jake Shimabukuro

Travels HITCHHIKE/EONE

By now, it's kind of a given that **Jake Shimabukuro** is the most innovative ukulele player on the planet (sorry, Eddie Vedder), and the most popular, with millions of YouTube hits and No. 1 placements on *Billboard*'s world music chart—that's all old news for the Honolulu-born musician. He's proven that he can adapt virtually any kind of song to his once-scorned instrument and create splendor. He's got nothing left to prove, so on *Travels*, Shimabukuro just does what he loves, creating new mini-masterpieces of his own and transforming the most unlikely of tunes. In the latter category are two mind-melters, the Jackson 5's "I'll Be There," played solo with refinement and dignity, and War's slyly funky "Low Rider," faithfully reproduced, growly, basso profundo vocal and all. Shimabukuro's own compositions slip and slide happily from genre to genre, from the quasi-reggae "Red-Eye" to the Latin-esque fusion of "Passport" to the solo introspection of the three-part "Departure Suite." So rich are Shimabukuro's harmonies, and so varied is his touch that, at times, it's easy to forget that you're listening to a ukulele. But it's never possible to stop marveling. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Terry Adams

Talk Thelonious CLANG

Terry Adams, the sole original member of NRBQ still with the group nearly 50 years into its run, has arguably been rock-and-roll's foremost proponent of the music of jazz-piano icon Thelonious Monk. (Honestly, can you even think of any others?) Monk's deconstructed chords, jagged rhythms and seemingly random (although, in truth, anything but) attack on the piano keys are endemic to Adams' own approach. So it's about time that he cut a solo set featuring his own arrangements of Monk's music. What's so brilliant about the mostly live *Talk Thelonious*, though, is how Adams simultaneously channels Monk's essence while never echoing the master's own style or licks. The hallmarks are all there as Adams, accompanied by current NRBQ members and others, wholly reimagines such jazz cornerstones as "In Walked Bud," "Straight, No Chaser" and other tunes more obscure, but the music is utterly contemporized. Even the instrumentation is often surprising: Adams on pipe organ, **Jim Hoke** on pedal steel. But the greatest surprise of all is how Adams often doesn't even sound like Terry Adams: With a softer, reverent, less manic approach, he turns these tunes into devotionals. Monk would dig. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Weyes Blood

Cardamom Times MEXICAN SUMMER

Weyes Blood is **Natalie Mering**, ex-member of art-noise-folk outfit Jackie-O Motherfucker. Her new four-song EP goes a little lighter on the guitar strumming than her 2014 full-length, and heavier on the gothic organ-soaked atmosphere and layered, harmonized, chant-like vocals. Drums are mostly absent this time. More than ever, Mering is working in the ghostly style of cult '60s British folk singers like Vashti Bunyan and Bridget St. John, or the like-minded and similarly brooding Canadian act Lightning Dust. Her voice is sturdy and can soar, but it has a depth and darkness much of the

time. "I'm still learning to be free and not so somber," she sings on "In The Beginning"—she may have a little ways to go on the somberness score. The briefness of this collection definitely stays true to the keep-'em-wanting-more principle, and there's plenty of heft and substance to these winter-weather songs. Listen for exquisite layers of flute or flute-like Mellotron throughout these tracks of longing and uncertainty. *John Adamian*

The Most Serene Republic

Mediac MAPLEMUSIC

It's been almost six years since Ontario's **The Most Serene Republic** dropped a proper LP—and four of those years were spent recording and tweaking *Mediac*, the band's fourth album. The wait is worthwhile, for *Mediac*'s 10 tracks beg repeat listens, preferably while walking over crunching leaves on a crisp fall morning. Produced by pianist **Ryan Lenssen** and **David Newfeld** (veteran producer of Broken Social Scene, TMSR's easiest comparison), the record balances the dueling forces in any dream-pop band well. The arrangements are certainly dreamy, with meandering strings and trombone on "Capitalist Waltz" and even a whistled melody on "Nation Of Beds," but not to the detriment of the songwriting. These tunes are well constructed, catchy and touching. The punchy "Ontario Morning," with its twinkling, ascending riff, recalls the feeling of waking up refreshed on a bright, sunny morning. When **Adrian Jewett** sings, "Get excited about this," on the spacey, gorgeous "Failure Of Anger," it's the excitement that lives in your chest, and the feeling that life—at least in that moment—is a beautiful thing indeed. *Justin Jacobs*

Joe Bonamassa

Live at Radio City Music Hall

J&R ADVENTURES

If there was ever any question, **Joe Bonamassa**'s place among the top ranks of today's guitar gods was affirmed with this triumphant two-night sellout at one of Manhattan's most revered musical venues. It isn't a small achievement; this is the same theater that once hosted Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, B.B. King and innumerable other entertainment icons. To his credit, the performance by Bonamassa and his band doesn't bow to show biz precepts; divided into acoustic and electric sets, this CD/video combo boasts mostly rarities and unreleased material rather than a perfunctory parade of so-called greatest hits. Bonamassa's vocals are in fine form, and his frenzied fretwork adds that extra edge on "I Can't Be Satisfied," "One Less Cross to Bear" and "Hidden Charms." There's added consistency in the upbeat approach, even when Bonamassa shares the spotlight with Double Trouble keyboardist **Reese Wynans** on the folkish "Trouble Town," fiddler and mandolin player **Gerry O'Connor** on the solitary "Still Water" and his crack rhythm section nearly everywhere else. A book capturing scenes from the show, a backstage featurette and a bonus video retracing Bonamassa's formative efforts give this package the feel of a flashy commemorative souvenir, a somewhat superfluous notion considering that the show's focus was on finesse. *Lee Zimmerman*

Ra Ra Riot

Need Your Light BARSUK

Ra Ra Riot's 2008 debut, *The Rhumb Line*, pulsed with a human heart; strings swelled around frontman **Wes Miles**' emo-earnest storytelling. The Syracuse, N.Y., band played with dynamics like a classical ensemble, with pop hooks thrown in for good measure. But on 2013's *Beta Love*, Ra Ra Riot were down a cellist and resurfaced, instead, with glistening synths. On *Need Your Light*, the band has pumped up the pop—these 10 tracks arrive with a buzzing, neon glow. Violinist **Rebecca Zeller** does poke out here and there, but *Need Your Light* sets aside subtlety in favor of a hipster party. Opener "Water," one of two tracks produced by now-former Vampire Weekend multi-instrumentalist **Rostam Batmanglij**, builds slowly over a piano and percussion groove before a blocky synth wall descends on the chorus. Ra Ra Riot reaches Matt & Kim-level power-pop with "Absolutely," as Miles sings, "It's the year of absolutely being, absolutely loving, absolutely crushing, absolutely everything." It's a proper farewell to fans of Ra Ra Riot's layered, baroque delicateness. But on its own merit, *Need Your Light* is a sugary, playful jolt (see "Every Time I'm Ready to Hug") begging for some love. *Justin Jacobs*

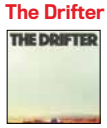
Chris Forsyth & the Solar Motel Band

The Rarity of Experience NO QUARTER

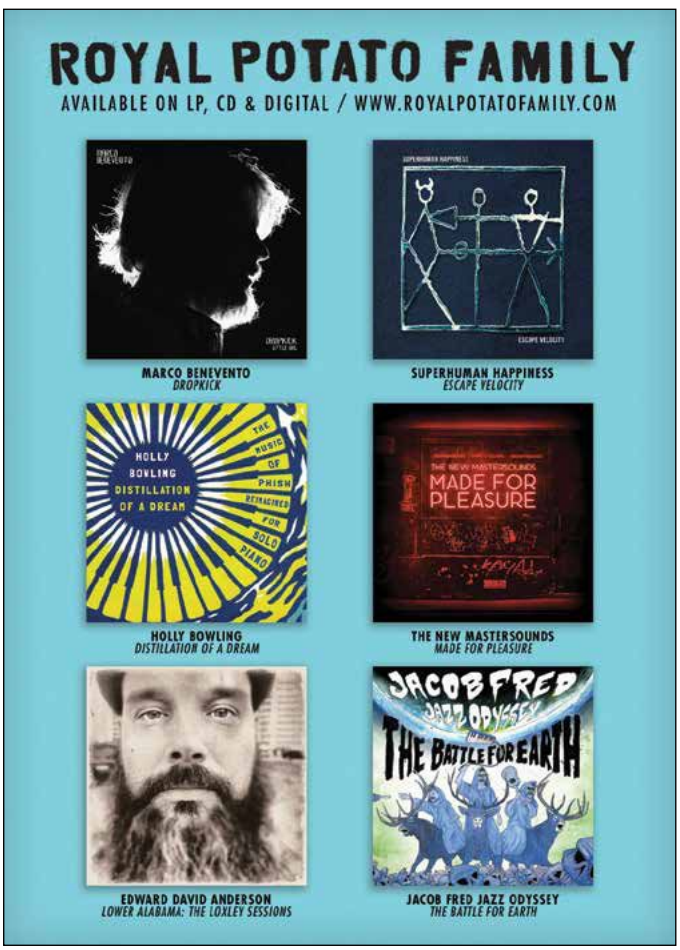
Before jammy bands got funky and indie acts got jammy, there existed some kind of utopian space that questing guitarists point at—the place beyond Duane Allman and Dickey Betts' blue skies in the first magical incarnation of the Allman Brothers, past what Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd's guitars promised in Television's late-'70s fire music. And **Chris Forsyth & the Solar Motel Band** seem to get there effortlessly on every track of *The Rarity of Experience*, the group's third and most fully realized effort yet, chiming and soaring and climbing invisible melodic ladders that turn into constellations and disappear before reforming into classic-rock codas. This time, too, the band stops to admire a few vistas, such as the long sax-abetted zone midway through the 12 minutes of "The First Ten Minutes of Cocksucker Blues" (named for the infamous, unreleased Rolling Stones documentary) or the lovely drift of the mostly drumless "Boston Street Lullaby." There's still unceasing intensity ("High Castle Rock") and, in places, Forsyth even sings, amiably and capably, if not quite memorably. But like Peter Frampton (and Otto's shoes) in the Homerpalooza episode of *The Simpsons*, dude's guitar is totally talking to me. *Jesse Jarnow*

Mike Flanigin

The Drifter BLACK BETTY



For over a quarter of a century, **Mike Flanigin** and his distinctive style on the Hammond B3 has supported some of the hottest names in Texas. And many of those famous friends



pay it back on the keyboardist's long-overdue solo debut, *The Drifter*. Produced by Flanigin himself and engineered by Spoon's **Jim Eno**, these 10 songs are a wellspring of ideas and styles rooted in vintage Lone Star bar boogie. Throughout *The Drifter*, their stylistic excursions range from orchestral jazz-pop (the **Kat Edmonson**-assisted "Nina") to heart-stopping soul ("Stop The World," featuring an stellar vocal turn from guitarist **Gary Clark Jr.**) to simmering blues duels with his former bosses ("All Nite Long" with **Jimmie Vaughan** and the Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown-penned title cut featuring ZZ Top's **Billy Gibbons**). Further excursions into gospel, garage rock and Lightnin' Hopkins-esque folk-guitar savvy help to make *The Drifter* one of the most exciting releases in recent memory. ***Ron Hart***

Kinky Friedman

The Loneliest Man I Ever Met

AVENUE A/THIRTY TIGERS

With his band The Texas Jewboys, **Kinky Friedman** confounded audiences in the '70s with his politically incorrect humor and hardcore country music. He cut one perfect album, 1973's *Sold American*, and several fairly good ones, before retiring from music to write more than 20 best-selling mystery novels. This album, his first in 39 years, is a low-key outing. With the exception of his duet with **Willie Nelson** and his band on "Bloody Mary Morning," most tracks feature Friedman's gruff, weary vocals and acoustic guitar, delivering the songs with the quiet intensity you'd expect in an intimate folk club. He covers tunes by Merle Haggard, Tom Waits, Bob Dylan and Warren Zevon's "My Shit's Fucked Up," a snide comment on mortality that could be a tossed-off one-liner, without Friedman's passionate vocal. There are two new Friedman originals here: "Lady Yesterday," a song that longs for reconciliation with a lost lover, and the title track, one of the best tunes Friedman's ever written and a potential country classic. Friedman's interpretations of the covers are fine, but the power of his original tunes makes you hope he'll return with an album of new material in the not-too-distant future. ***J. Poet***

Cian Nugent

Night Fiction WOODSIST

Plenty of guitarists have made the leap from expressive solo instrumentalists to arrangement-oriented songwriters, but few navigate it with the ease or panache that Irish musician **Cian Nugent** displays on *Night Fiction*. Seemingly hell-bent on reclaiming his family's good name from a certain nutzoid Texan guitarist, the album still builds from Nugent's instrumental voice but discovers that his singing voice is just as plaintive and self-aware—his lyrics somehow an extension of his playing. The guitar is front and center (and boldly dashing) on solo instrumental acoustic performances like "Lucy," but serves even better on the solo non-instrumental "Nightlife," which seems to open a late-night channel to whatever world Neil Young's "Motion Pictures" was broadcast from. But *Night Fiction* accelerates gleefully from quiet reveries to full-tilt boogie, as on the nearly 12 minutes of the album-closing "Year of the Snake." There's nothing else nearly as long, and yet it also seems to encapsulate Nugent's M.O.—standing alone while still connected to everything around him by his unmistakable voice, audible everywhere. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Rangda

The Heretic's Bargain DRAG CITY

On their third full-length, **Rangda** start to sound less like a supergroup and more like a band, and not just any band. Starring Sun City Girls co-founder **Richard Bishop** and Six Organs of Admittance lead honcho **Ben Chasny** on droning modal guitars, and freelance, free-jazz extended technique hero **Chris Corsano** on drums, the trio shred no less than usual on *The Heretic's Bargain*, but finally gel into something bigger than themselves. Their voices couple into something precise and powerful on the high-speed steamroller "To Melt the Moon" and into something abstract and equally powerful on "Hard Times Befall the Door-to-Door Glass Shard Salesman," with Corsano's drums finding a tumbling space between the assertive noise leads of Bishop and Chasny. Rangda seems like a perfect development for all three musicians, especially Bishop, picking up some of the more freewheeling electric threads that the prolific Sun City Girls dropped when they disbanded in 2007. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Sia

This Is Acting RCA

It's sometimes easy to forget that **Sia** is a straight-up pop star. The singer has been obscuring her face from the public for several years, refusing to play into the press machine that transforms vocalists into Rihannas or Taylor Swifts. But Sia's music belongs alongside that of those stars—her songs fueled by infectious hooks and surging melodies. "Alive" is a massive anthem, with Sia flexing her voice to its full range, while "Move Your Body" is an explosive '80s-style dance track. As her seventh album, *This Is Acting* is a huge shift from Sia's early indie singer-songwriter career. It reveals an artist who has mastered the skill of a pop hook and knows where to restrain herself and where to let go for the most intense sonic release. "Reaper," co-written and produced by **Kanye West**, is not the album's standout, mostly because Sia is best when you let her wail, as she does best on aptly titled opener "Bird Set Free." ***Emily Zemler***

School of Seven Bells

SVIIB VAGRANT

SVIIB stands as New York group **School of Seven Bells**' final album, an impressive and emotional punctuation to the end of a four-record career. The songs were written primarily in the summer of 2012, several months before singer, guitarist and Secret Machines alum **Benjamin Curtis** died of lymphoma. Curtis' bandmate **Alejandra Deheza** finished the music in 2014 with producer **Justin Meldal-Johnsen**, and it's important that she did. The tracks here are lush and beautiful, carried by Deheza's ethereal croon and soaring instrumentals and synth parts. The singer has called the album a "love letter from start to finish," and that sentiment resonates throughout, both in its lyrics and in its careful execution. *SVIIB* is possibly School of Seven Bells' best work, from the glowing ambience of "On My Heart" to the propulsive glitter of "A Thousand Times More." It's impossible to know what Curtis contributed and what Deheza and Meldal-Johnsen continued, but it's nice to imagine the album like an exquisite corpse drawing, each artist's part seamlessly melding into the others'. "Now I can't promise anything," Deheza sings on "A Thousand Times More," "except to say this hurt will pass." With that thought—and the rest of the album—the musician reminds us that music is the essential instrument of healing. ***Emily Zemler***

Chairlift

Moth COLUMBIA

Few singers can recall both Kate Bush and Carly Rae Jepsen in subsequent breaths: "I'm sorry I'm causing a scene on the train/ I'm falling, I'm falling, I'm falling for you," **Caroline Polachek** sings on "Crying In Public," hopping octaves like the world's artiest pop diva. With their third LP, *Moth*, she and multi-instrumentalist **Patrick Wimberly** carve out a seductive sweet spot between their formative electro-pop and the experimental fringes of 2012's *Something*—marrying stadium-tailored choruses with shapeshifting arrangements. It's easy to imagine Beyoncé (a previous **Chairlift** collaborator) belting the hypnotic chorus of "Ch-Ching," though it's likely she would have vetoed the left-field saxophone; "Romeo" starts out as a simple synth-pop tune before colliding with ugly industrial guitar distortion. Throughout the LP, Polachek and Wimberly sound more confident balancing strange and straightforward. But *Moth*'s unexpected centerpiece, "Ottawa To Osaka," deviates from that ying-yang by going full-blown art-pop. Five minutes of globetrotting textures, the track weaves in gurgling electronics, Asian strings and icy rapping—yet somehow makes coherent sense. Such is Chairlift's odd allure. ***Ryan Reed***

OpenHearts Society

Driftwood Radio SELF-RELEASED

The sophomore set from Canadian trio **OpenHearts Society**, *Driftwood Radio* reflects everything the album title implies, a hazy backcountry ramble infused with seamless arrangements, lush harmonies and memorable melodies that connect on first listen. "I was a star without a singer, no instruments to play upon," they sing on opener "I Am Jung," setting a serendipitous tone for all that follows. Co-helmed by guitarist/bassist/singer **Eric Schenkman** (best known as Spin Doctors' founding guitarist), vocalist **Sarah McDermott** and keyboardist/singer **H. Chris Brown**, OpenHearts Society does justice to their handle via their sweet sentiments and melodious designs. Special guests drummer **Anton Fier**, Schenkman's Spin Doctors bandmate **Aaron Comess** and folkie **Sarah Harmer** lend support, but it's the trio that sets the standard. Every track becomes a standout of sorts, from the ragtag "Married Man" to the mellow, meandering, pedal-steel-infused cover of "Once in a Lifetime" and the unassuming but irresistible tones and twang of "Corruption" and "Didn't We." Suffice it to say, *Driftwood Radio* demands a place on your dial. ***Lee Zimmerman***

OFF THE TRACKS

Robert Norris

New Old Songs SELF-RELEASED

Early on, Massachusetts-based singer **Robert Norris** spent time playing and writing original music with some local artists, but he gave all that up in the '90s. "I basically ran out of steam and decided to get on with my life," Norris said in a 2010 interview, just around the time he started singing again. Norris began working with both a Boston-area studio and a group of professional studio musicians with whom he communicated and collaborated online. The resulting recordings have been released as *New Old Songs*, a collection of 18 tunes written by Norris over his career, reimagined and slickly executed. The album shows the two equally earnest sides of the singer—the piano-led crooner blues of songs like album-opener "The Way We Used to Be" and the guitar-driven blues-rock that dominates the record with songs like "The Heat," "Do What You Gotta Do" and "The Last Woman." ***Matt Inman***

Guerilla Toss

Eraser Stargazer DFA

Hitting the gigantic, happy points of jammy bands, woolier DIY acts and heavy beat-makers alike, Boston-founded and Brooklyn-based noise-groove quintet **Guerilla Toss** seem poised to take the festival circuit by storm just as soon as a hit finds them. After a dozen LPs/tapes on tiny labels, *Eraser Stargazer* arrives with maximum fun via DFA, the disco-indie imprint co-founded by LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy. With reggae-yawping vocalist **Kassie Carlson** at center stage, the band's music is filled with the insistent and unrelenting neon waves that recall the wildest moments of Brian Eno's collaborations with Talking Heads. While the eight songs pulse with the implication of mosh pits to come and colors explode and swirl, mostly splattered by **Toby Aronson**'s synth, the groove-noise is clearly the main event. None of Carlson's octave-jumping vocal emissions quite cut it as earworms, but all of the shouting is intoxicating, as is the project as a whole. Sounding effortlessly of the moment and over the top, Guerilla Toss ticks like a cross between a bomb and a racing heart. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Nada Surf

You Know Who You Are BARSUK

Nada Surf have stretched this trademark approach—a power-pop jangle built on saccharine choruses and wind-blown guitar strums—across two decades, standing firm through assorted rock trends. Even if prodded by

a gun to his back, **Matthew Caws** couldn't write a song any other way. But does he need to? There's a comfort in that dependability, knowing that Nada's hopeful yet melancholy hooks will always be there. The quartet hasn't reinvented the wheel on their eighth album, but some intriguing new quirks elevate *You Know Who You Are* above business as usual. "You know, you know the feeling/ It starts with just a little tingling," Caws sings on the bruising title track—and as those bright chords ring out, the line feels like a knowing wink from band to fan. But the hammer-on riffs pack extra muscle—perhaps the influence of former Guided By Voices guitarist **Doug Gillard**, who is now an official member following stints as a guest musician. Elsewhere, the newcomer elevates "Animal" with his country-tinged leads, adding pixie-dust magic to the psychedelic "Gold Sounds." But *You Know Who You Are* is an appropriate title: Caws has never sounded more assured as a songwriter. ***Ryan Reed***

Poliça

United Crushers MOM + POP

"Change the locks on your last friend/ Bang and book her, court with lies," **Channy Leaneagh** croons on "Baby Sucks," a sinewy slab of gothic R&B. "You're a lame duck, smoking void/ Irish goodbye, effeminate disguise." Say what? Like **Poliça**'s previous two LPs—2012 debut *Give You the Ghost* and follow-up *Shulamith*—*United Crushers* operates on an intuitive, visceral level. Leaneagh's actual words aren't important—but married to **Ryan Olson**'s hypnotic production, the gibberish sounds astute. Poliça stick to a firm template: rippling analog synths, slap bass, the stereo-panned thwack of two drum kits. But Leaneagh has always been the wild card, often hovering over the grooves like an Auto-Tuned phantom or mumbling in a stream-of-consciousness murk. With *Crushers*, she sounds more confident as a pure frontwoman: On epics like "Someway" and "Lose You," her artful soul runs serve as hooks, rather than ornamentations. "I cannot fuck you enough/ And I wanna wake up wanting your touch," she sings on the latter, a moment of seductive emotional clarity. ***Ryan Reed***

Israel Nash

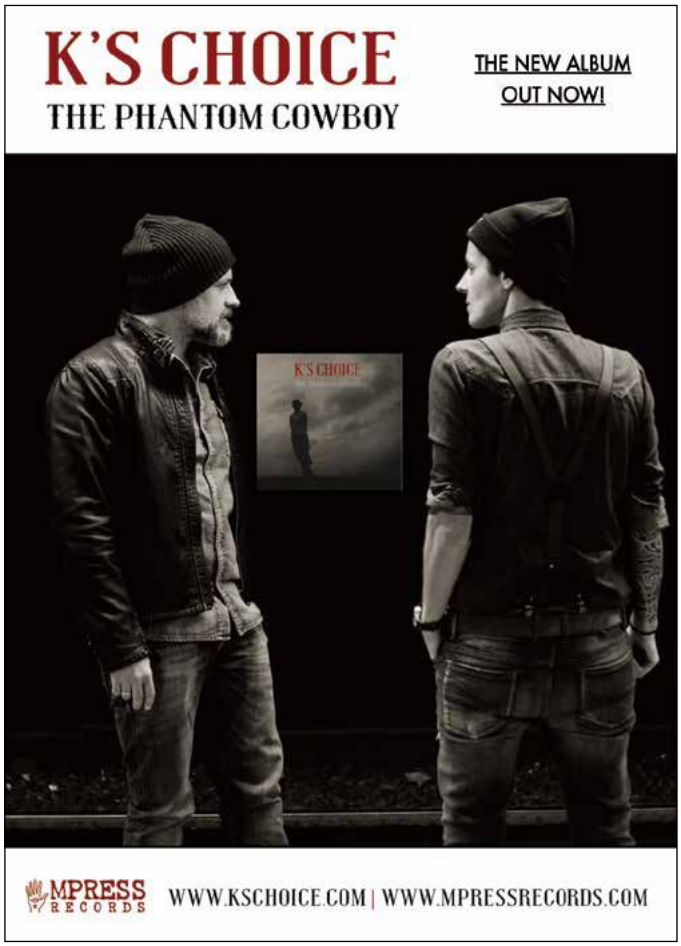
Silver Season LOOSE/THIRTY TIGERS

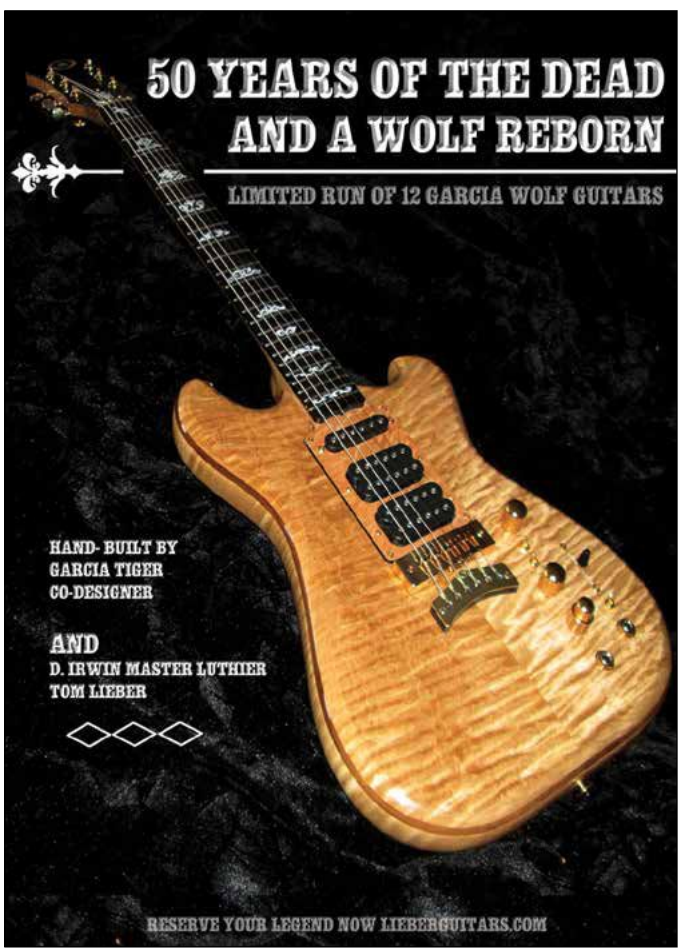
If **Israel Nash**'s voice gives you déjà vu, then it may be because the man sounds like he descended from your most lovely of daydreams—but more likely, it's because he's a dead ringer for an early-days Neil Young. *Silver Season*, Nash's fourth LP, whose cosmic forefather is the legendary *After the Gold Rush*, was recorded in the studio he built on his 15-acre property in Dripping Springs, Texas. That sense of open space is all over the nine-song album, with sprawling, swirling Americana arrangements. Stripped-down to an acoustic guitar, gorgeous opener "Willow" or the swooning "LA Lately" would be perfect campfire fodder. These gems are stretched and pulled into wonderfully ragged vehicles of mellow, psychedelic vibes. Nash is a familiarly world-weary narrator (with a possible Young nod) when he sings, "So tired of the people; they just bring me down" on "Parlour Song." There's nothing red hot like "Southern Man" here. Rather, Nash's songs gently ripple and rhythmically churn—check out the echoing intro dive into the rolling "Strangers"—creating an ethereal, fluid atmosphere. Nash is among excellent psych-Americana peers (Father John Misty, Jonathan Wilson and Phosphorescent come to mind), but the heavenly mixture of sound and space makes *Silver Season* a standout. ***Justin Jacobs***

Tedeschi Trucks Band

Let Me Get By FANTASY/CONCORD

Derek Trucks has described *Let Me Get By* as the "first autonomous record" that **Tedeschi Trucks Band** has made: the first since the dissolution of the Allman Brothers Band (of which he was an integral component during the band's home stretch), first for a new label, first written entirely by the band members. It undeniably feels like a fresh start, a resetting of course, from the opening notes of "Anyhow," whose opening lyrics—"Running from a bitter taste/ Took a rest from all the chase/ Feeling something anchored on my soul"—declare that liberation loud and clear, through "In Every Heart," the blues-infused finale. If the band—12 members strong—has been working toward defining a sound till now, then *Let Me Get By* is where it takes shape. On the eight-minute "Crying Over You/ Swamp Raga"—its first section sung by **Mike Mattison**, who co-wrote the number with Trucks and **Susan Tedeschi**—spends its first three-quarters reveling in pure, funky, large-ensemble soul before, suddenly, and quite effectively, slipping into the calming meditation suggested by the title's second half. It's as much classic TTB as "Laugh About It" and the title track—gutsy, inspirational numbers that'll have you shakin' a tail feather, whether you want to or not. The usual TTB cogs are firmly in place, with some tweaking—Trucks' sublime slide has gotten both sweeter and tougher, Tedeschi's own guitar takes a more upfront position alongside her vocals, and newish bassist **Tim Lefebvre** brings some serious power-drive. But, here, the focus on song structure and groupthink adds up to a wholeness that was, before, still elusive. ***Jeff Tamarkin***





Plundering The Vaults

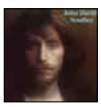
Fleetwood Mac
Tusk (Deluxe Edition) RHINO

Poor *Tusk*. If it had been anyone else's album, and had been released at any other time, it would've been considered a smash hit: It reached No. 4 on the Billboard album chart and ultimately went double platinum, after all. But *Tusk* had the misfortune of being the 1979 follow-up to **Fleetwood Mac**'s *Rumours*, which spent 31 weeks at the top of that same chart, won the Grammy for Album of the Year, etc. *Rumours* is one of the most flawless *and* most successful albums of all time; *Tusk* ranges from pretty damn good to just OK. Rhino's attempt to give the album new life will likely be of interest to those who cared a whole lot about the album to begin with. Both the five-CD configuration and the three-discer are packed with a ton of rare studio and live tracks: the usual outtakes, demos and "The Alternate *Tusk*," which is just what it sounds like, variations on each of the 20 tracks on the original release. Either version might pique curiosity and force a re-evaluation by some, but will the deluxe edition ultimately change perceptions at this late date? The **Lindsey Buckingham**-dominated album, despite having produced two hit singles in the title track and "Sara," still feels mostly like a fractured, unfocused also-ran and six consecutive takes of "I Know I'm Not Wrong" doesn't change that.
Jeff Tamarkin

Bob Dylan
The Cutting Edge 1965–1966: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 12– Deluxe Edition COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Do you really need seven more hours of unreleased **Bob Dylan** alternate takes? Do we really need to keep having this conversation? Yes, and we have been/will, at least once a year (if not more) for a while. The long version of *The Cutting Edge*–every second of tape recorded at every Bob Dylan session in 1965 and 1966–is 18 discs, released for copyright reasons, but also because Bob Dylan was a human song-faucet. The shorter consumer-grade compilations come as more reasonable two- and six-disc versions. And, in the same way, the set comes overstuffed with wonders for every level of Dylanologist, from simple, buried sweetness of "Farewell, Angelina" (the end of Dylan's first folk period) to the cross-dressin' proto-punk swagger of "Jet Pilot" (in a matter of months, of course) and then to the hard-grooving fragment "Lunatic Princess." The six-disc *Cutting Edge* is the sound of Dylan unfolding, of course, but it is also the sound of many incredible session musicians reacting in real-time to Dylan's whims. More pop than rock, the sessions capture experiments in big-band folk arranging, including **Al Kooper**'s sublime celeste on "Queen Jane Approximately (Take 2)" and **Bobby Gregg**'s drums on early runs of "Mr. Tambourine Man," which Dylan rightly dispenses with before they can make it through a complete take. The fun is endless, except that the producers left some of the most interesting material for the 18-disc set: a half-dozen originals from casual hotel room settings never recorded anywhere else. But *The Cutting Edge* is brilliant, even if some of it sounds like '70s-'10s Dylan, making up new arrangements on the spot, and a reminder that it's all he's ever done.
Jesse Jarnow

J.D. Souther
John David Souther
Black Rose
Home By Dawn
OMINVORE



The quintessential '70s singer-songwriter, **J.D. Souther** made his name, and presumably his fortune, by penning numerous signature songs for the Eagles–"Best of My Love," "New Kid in Town" and "Heartache Tonight" among them. Years later, the Eagles returned to their source, using Souther's "How Long" as the lead single heralding their 2007 studio comeback, *Long Road Out of Eden*. Ironically, that song was included on Souther's eponymous debut, which, like each of the albums that followed, helped define the emerging sound of country rock in the early '70s. Indeed, while Souther's three albums reissued here ought not to be measured by a familiarity factor, all helped raise the bar for a new crop of '70s songsmiths. Quality was always assured, and now, augmented by a cache of add-ons–demos, live tracks and unreleased recordings–each demands rediscovery. Souther's formidable debut may be the best of the bunch, if only for the fact that his talents were already fully formed. Yet both *Black Rose* and *Home By Dawn* are essential, the former for its star-studded supporting cast and songs such as "Silver Blue," "Banging My Head Against the Moon," and "Faithless Love," which quickly emerged as a country-rock standard. The latter contained "I'll Take Care of You," which, when covered by the Dixie Chicks, added another chart-topper to his résumé while heralding a sound that would later be dubbed Americana. Outside efforts aside, Souther's singing makes each number his own, which is reason enough to bring belated appreciation to these individual entries.
Lee Zimmerman

Weather Report
The Legendary Live Tapes 1978–1981 COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Jazz-fusion music has undergone such a twisty trajectory since its heyday: At first, the melding of rock power with jazz improvisation was considered nothing less than revolutionary, then it fell out of

J.D. Souther

favor and, now, it's experiencing something of a renaissance. But the impact of **Weather Report** has never been in question. This was a band that, at its peak (represented here on a four-disc collection of previously unreleased live material) included four undisputed geniuses: keyboardist **Joe Zawinul**, saxophonist **Wayne Shorter**, drummer **Peter Erskine** and, perhaps the most celebrated bassist in jazz history, **Jaco Pastorius**. Oddly, quality live recordings of this outfit (augmented on half the tracks by percussionist **Robert Thomas Jr.**) have always been relatively elusive, so this box set is irrefutably a major addition to the Weather Report discography. While there are undoubtedly moments of excess—solos and jams that simply outstay their welcome—most of the music is sublime: 1978 Tokyo recordings of Zawinul's "Birdland" and "Black Market" showcase each musician's strengths as soloists and ensemble players, and the conversation between Shorter and the others on his "Port Of Entry" will leave your jaw hanging in awe. And if you've ever thought bass solos had to be boring by their very nature, Pastorius' two eight-minute displays here will obliterate that idea from your mind forever. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Procol Harum

Procol Harum
Shine on Brightly
A Salty Dog
Home

ESOTERIC/MVD

Procol Harum are perhaps the most unfortunate casualty of the one-hit-wonder effect in British rock—their iconic hit "A Whiter Shade of Pale" has overshadowed most everything the group has done over their near half-century existence. But the band's sonic reach stretched much further than the folky, swirly, Van Morrison-esque power ballad that came to unjustly define them. Especially in the context of their kaleidoscopic first quartet of LPs, magnificently reissued by the Cherry Red subsidiary Esoteric Recordings. Truth be told, there is a certain air of delicacy that underlies the force behind 1967's *Procol Harum*, 1968's *Shine On Brightly*, 1969's *A Salty Dog* and 1970's *Home*, especially given frontman **Gary Brooker**'s penchant for the more whimsical aspect of their unique hybrid of rock and Bach. But when the singer steps back and lets original guitarist **Robin Trower** take the lead, Procol is as heavy and swinging a white blues group as Cream or Led Zeppelin. (You can hear it in the grit and crunch of such cuts as *A Salty Dog* B-side "Long Gone Geek" and *Home*'s searing opening track, "Whisky Train.") And what's great about these deluxe editions of the first four albums—in addition, of course, to the keen attention paid to the albums' distinctive cover art—is that within the abundance of bonus material affixed to each title, the might of Procol's AOR ferocity really comes to the fore. Particularly on the BBC tracks, where Trower transforms relatively tame songs, like *Brightly's* "Wish Me Well," and "Kaleidoscope," off their eponymous debut, into raging infernos of electric guitar fury. As these essential reissues prove, there are a great many more shades to Procol Harum than the one for which they are most known. *Ron Hart*

Various Artists

Wayfaring Strangers: Cosmic American Music NUMERO GROUP

The deep-digging heroes at Chicago's archival Numero Group label don't venture into longhair territory very often, but it's almost always a special treat when they do, and *Wayfaring Strangers: Cosmic American Music* is no exception. Exploring the stoned spaces of small-batch, country-tinged folk-rock LPs, the 19 tracks map an alternate United States of lonesome musical anti-heroes spanning from 1968 to 1980. The highlights and connections are plentiful, from a crisp drop-in by pioneering guitarist **Clarence White** (**Mistress Mary**'s "And I Didn't Want You") to an appearance by future Jerry Garcia Band fiddler **Kenny Kosek** (**White Cloud**'s "All Cried Out"), from secret existential classics (**Kathy Heideman**'s "Sleep a Million Years") to easy and enormous choruses (**Jeff Cowell**'s "Not Down This Low"). Unifying

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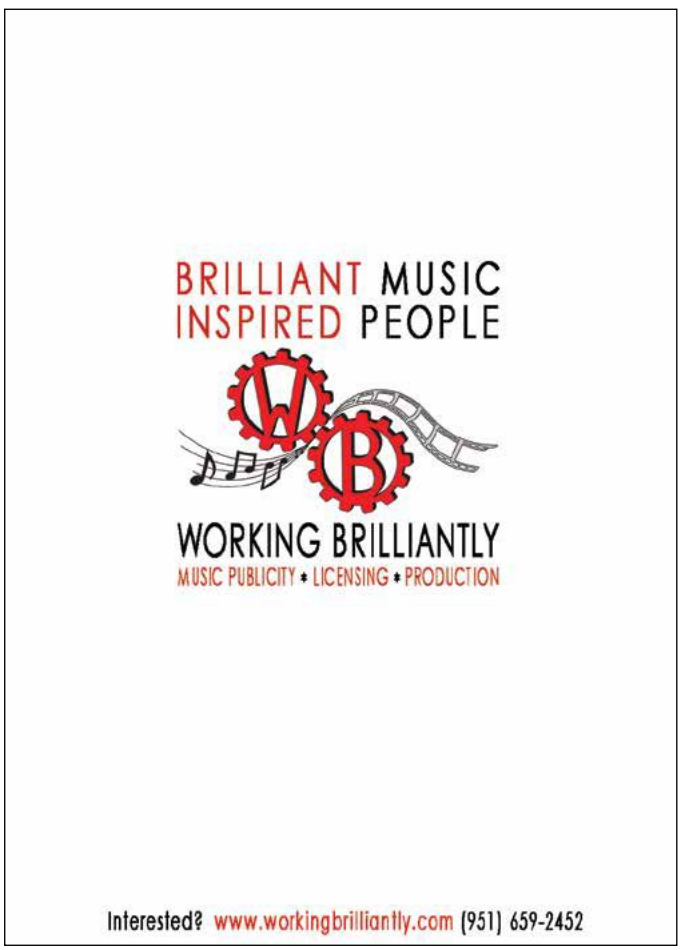

the tracks, besides ample pedal steel, are the forgotten narratives and unheralded dreams of the musicians, captured ably in the label's always-detailed liner notes, and often appropriately heartbreaking. As the notes point out, though, country rock was perhaps *the* dominant American genre in the post-Eagles '70s. As such, the demarcation point between "cosmic" and "American" can sometimes grow a little hazy in practice, such as with Colorado's **Black Canyon Gang**, whose wayfaring narrative checks out, but whose music is mostly just country-folk. But genres are supposed to be hazy, and the words "cosmic," "American" and "music" cover a lot of territory. Splitting hairs (especially long ones) is beside the point, which is to provide a virtual Nudie-suited shoulder to cry on, and the Numero Group's is invitingly spangled. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Arthur Lee & Love

Coming Through to You: The Live Recordings (1970-2004) ROCKBEAT

At the forefront of the West Coast psychedelic movement—with their graceful yet disquieting mix of stately arrangements, pre-punk angst, and fractured, enigmatic lyrics—Love provided an important link between the jangle of The Byrds and the apocalyptic bite of The Doors. One of rock's most inscrutable auteurs, singer-songwriter **Arthur Lee** was every inch a rock star—some said a black Mick Jagger—with his lean, dangerous visage, diamond-shaped granny glasses, prodigious sexual appetite, and a wardrobe that Jimi Hendrix emulated and drove Brian Jones pea-green with envy. More than once, Jim Morrison remarked he hoped his band would be as big as **Love**. But Lee was a reclusive introvert who hated to tour outside Los Angeles, which hindered the success of the band and led to a scarcity of live recordings. Fortunately, the sleuths at RockBeat managed to unearth live tracks from the '70s, '90s and '00s; five never-before-released songs; and one disc of rather high-quality fan recordings. They span the band's lifetime, exploring different lineups and shifts in focus, including a near-complete latter-day re-creation of the group's classic *Forever Changes*, several acoustic performances and a scattering of covers, including Hendrix's "Little Wing" and Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning." Despite the stylistic differences, Lee's unnerving presence and eccentric voice were always at the core of Love: slurry, blurry, druggy, but all-knowing. Not surprisingly, over the years, his voice lost some of its range and prettiness. His falsettos feel like parodies in the '90s version of the band, but his bruised soul and pragmatic worldview were intact until his 2006 death from leukemia, dispensing sound advice for generations to come and always returning to one of his central themes: that the world is what you make of it, not the way you want it to be. ***Jaan Uhelszki***

John Cale

Music for a New Society + M:FANS

DOUBLE SIX/DOMINO

Now considered his brooding masterpiece, **John Cale**'s hollowed-out *Music for a New Society* isn't a record you just sit down and listen to; it's an unfamiliar door you open or, as producer Frazier Mohawk once put it to describe Nico's *The Marble Index* (a pre-goth classic also haunted by Cale's expressionist arrangements), "a hole you fall into." The album had an uneasy birth, to say the least, at a time in Cale's life when he was unapologetically at war with his inner demons. Cale wasn't inclined to talk about it for more than 30 years, until he and his band performed the album in full, for the first time ever, at Denmark's Aarhus Festival in 2013. That inspired him to rework the original, starting with the mournful "If You Were Still Around," which he molded into a churchy tribute to Lou Reed (and other departed friends) and released as a video on the first anniversary of Reed's death. From there, the project snowballed into this double-disc set, pairing the original album with its tech-modern mirror image. Now as then, key moments in "Taking Your Life in Your Hands," "Sanctus (Sanities)" and "Close Watch" (in its new incarnation featuring the Dirty Projectors' **Amber Coffman**) come across as stark warnings, wounded laments and primal screams. "Set fire to anything, set fire to the air," Cale sings once again, ever the restless soul, but fueled now by fury rather than sadness—which makes the descent all the more thrilling this time around. ***Bill Murphy***

Various Artists

Hulaland: The Golden Age of Hawaiian Music ROCKBEAT

The Hawaiian music most of us hear is mired in clichés—snippets of "hula music" or slide guitar played in the background of movies and TV shows to indicate that you're in a tropical playground. This four-disc set contains 106 songs from the '20s-'70s, and the project was curated by **Robert Armstrong** of the Cheap Suit Serenaders. The discs are packaged in a 100-page book with a bit of historical background and a lot of vintage art. There's good music, a fair amount of kitsch and hits with a Hawaiian influence. Slack-key guitar is sadly lacking, but you can't fit everything onto 106 tracks. Highlights include: **Roy Smeck**, the Jimi Hendrix of the ukulele shredding through "Crazy Uke" with jaw-dropping dexterity; **Sol Hoopii**, the slide guitarist who helped introduce the instrument to country-music singers, doing the mellow "King Kamehameha" and "La Rosita" (with a quote from "St. Louis Blues' in his solo), as well as the swingin' "I Like You;" sax player **Andy Iona** and his band blending hot jazz and Hawaiian steel on "Minnehaha," the tongue-twisting rave-up "Vana Vana" and "On a Little Bamboo Bridge," featuring **Louis Armstrong** on vocals; **Felix Mendelssohn** (descended from the composer of the same name) and his **Hawaiian Serenaders** doing Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo;" ukulele ace **Janet Klein & Her Parlor Boys** doing a klezmer/Hawaiian fusion on "Yiddish Hula Boy;" and tracks by **The Ventures**, **Martin Denny**, **Santo & Johnny** and **Arthur Lyman**. ***J. Poet***

Bert Jansch

Live at the 12 Bar EARTH

One of the seminal figures of the British mid-'60s folk scene, **Bert Jansch** was both an accomplished guitarist and a revered master of both traditional and contemporary roots idioms. This superb concert, recorded in the summer of 1995 at London's 12 Bar, showcases those strengths succinctly and without any embellishment, putting the focus exactly where it ought to be—specifically, on Jansch's deft fretwork and on his rich, sonorous vocals. Even on his own, he conjures up an atmospheric sound that's both haunting and harrowing at the same time. Opening track "Summer Heat" offers one of the best examples, but the lovely "Curragh Of Kildare," the vibrant blues of "Come Back Baby" and "Trouble In Mind," and his haunting take on Jackson C. Frank's classic "Blues Run the Game" all testify to his taste and talent. His dexterity and acumen are showcased to consistently good effect, especially on the album's two instrumentals, "Betts Dance" and "Blackwaterside," the latter an obvious influence on a young Jimmy Page. A singular talent, Jansch cast a wide net and offered inspiration to scores of young guitarists who followed in his wake. This particular performance makes it all too clear exactly why. ***Lee Zimmerman***

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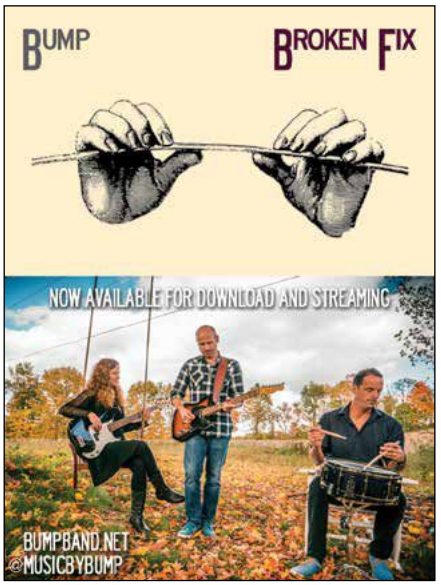
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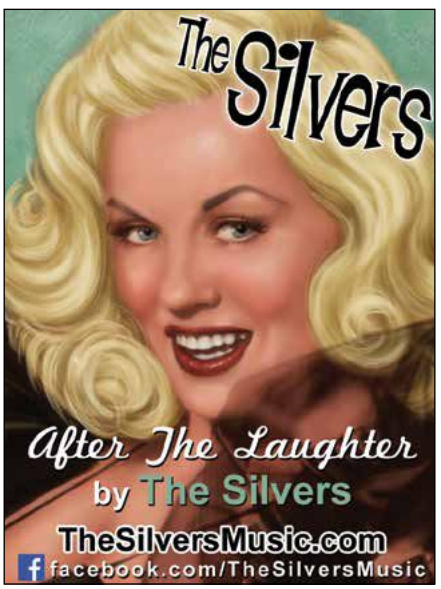
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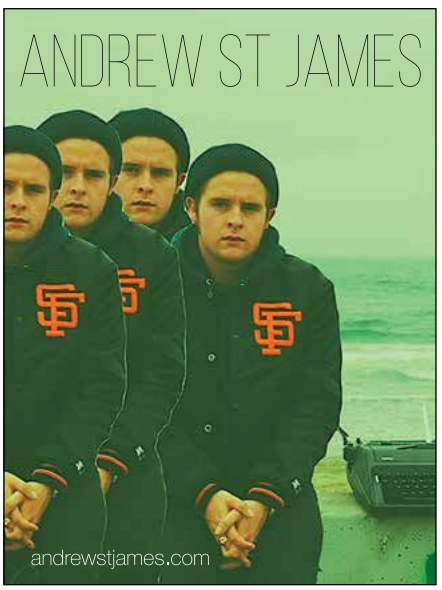
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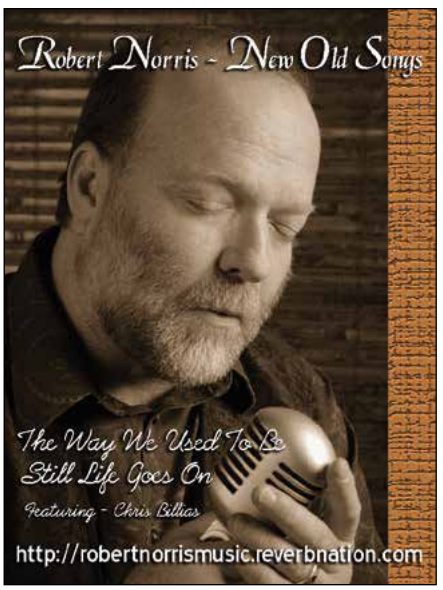
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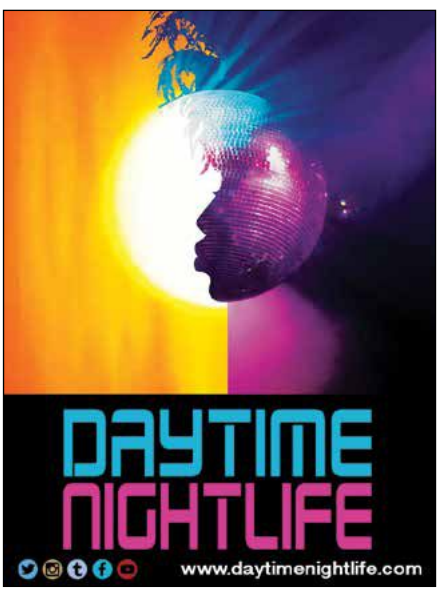
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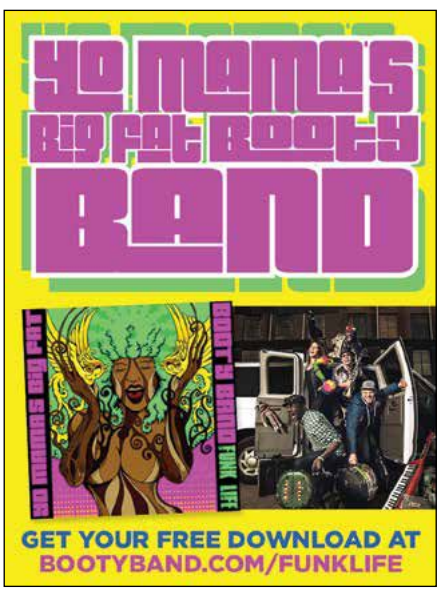
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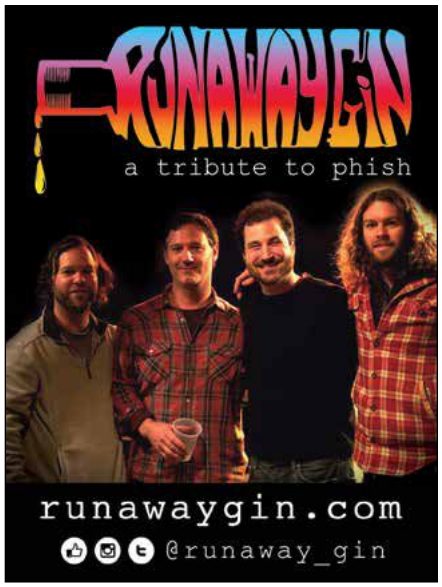

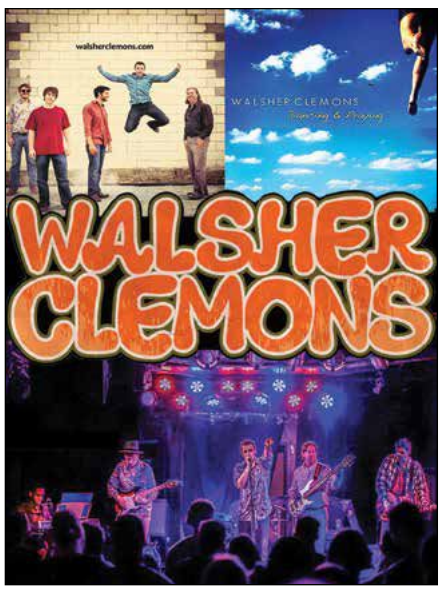

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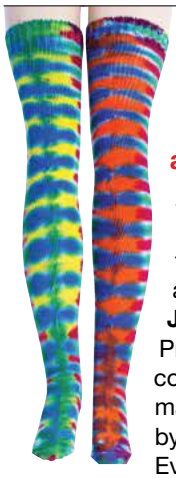

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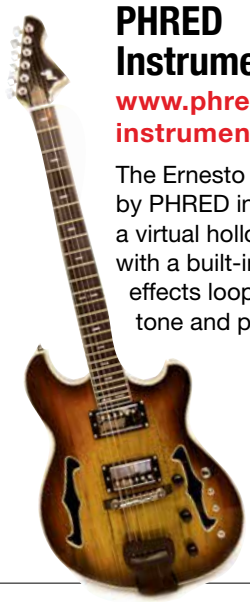

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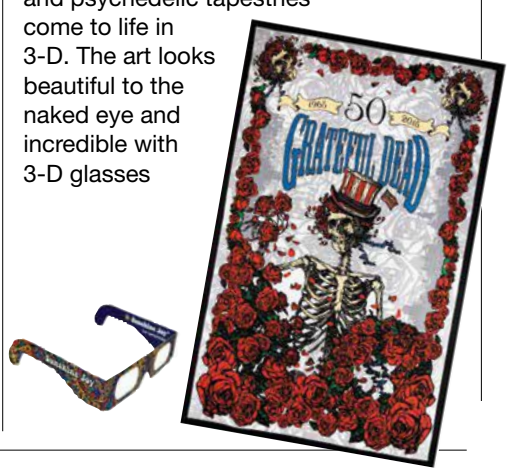

Parking Lot

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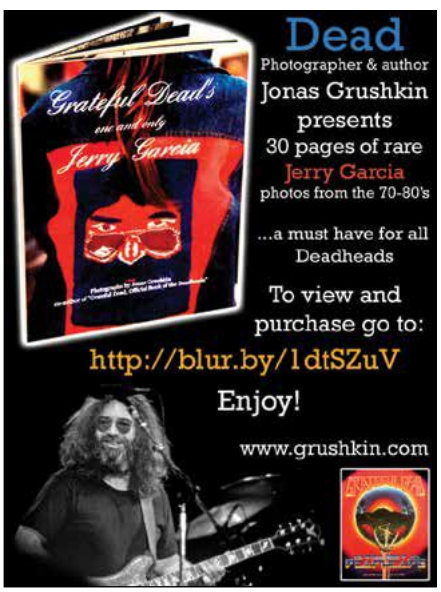

Remembering Rodney Speed

We're saddened to report that **Rodney Speed** passed away on January 14. A welcome, familiar face at Wetlands Preserve, Speed worked at the club throughout its history, from 1989 through 2001, filling a number of roles, while living his dream by remaining in such close proximity to music. Following Wetlands' closure, Speed found work at other area venues as a staffer and DJ, including CBGB, B.B. King's and Brooklyn Bowl. He also became a performer in his own right as the frontman of The Rodney Speed Experience, which gigged around New York City.

Throughout his life, Rodney Speed maintained a deep appreciation and encyclopedic knowledge of music. Along with his positive spirit, Speed represented everything that one could hope for in a music fan and a member of the music community. He was a shining light to many.

His close friend, co-worker and bandmate Jake Szufnarowski reflects: "I'm speechless. I'm stunned. I'm in shock. I'm completely devastated. I can hardly breathe, much less talk or type. Today, I lost my best friend, my big brother, my little brother, my soul mate and my inspiration all at once. Rocks Off lost our mascot. The Rodney Speed Experience lost our leader. New York City lost our best DJ. The world of rock and roll lost our most loving and lively patron saint, and its most spirited motivator and cheerleader. And the universe lost our biggest dreamer and its brightest soul."

The tributes to Speed included a photo montage posted by Cheap Trick, as well as a message from Rodney Speed Experience bandmate Bill Stites, who added the following via Facebook: "I'm realizing that, as the sole constant member—other than the man himself—of The Rodney Speed Experience over the last damn-near-15 years, Rodney was actually the person I've been in a band with the longest in my life. I'm proud to have stood next to him as he lived out his dreams in front of packed houses at the clubs that loved him as family—Wetlands, CBGB, B.B. King's and so many others—for crowds that were often unsuspecting but never unappreciative. Jake's commitment to making sure Rodney's life was as awesome as he was has never been less than inspiring, and I feel privileged to have been present for so many of the moments when Rodney's normally taciturn demeanor melted away and the pure, childlike excitement and joy underneath came through. I mean, just look at this guy—the man was a true New York City rock-and-roll legend, and I'll miss him."

Rodney Speed in action

The 20 Most Popular 'Live At Relix' Videos of 2015

In 2015, Brian Stollery and our video team captured hundreds of hours of live performances. Highlights included our Relix Conversation series (with **Warren Haynes** and **John Scofield**, **Luther Dickinson** and **Anders Osborne** and **Bill Kreutzmann** and **Benjy Eisen**), our Airstream Live at Lockn' series and, of course, our ongoing Live At Relix performances. Here's a list of the 20 most popular videos recorded at *Relix*. Watch them all at: relix.com/top20vids.

1. Seth Avett & Jessica Lea Mayfield Sing Elliott Smith
2. Steve Earle: The Relix Session
3. Real Estate: "And I Love Her" and "Snow Days"
4. Brandon Niederauer: "The No Name Song" (For Now)
5. Chris Robinson & Neal Casal: "Appaloosa" and "The Last Place That Love Lives"
6. Butch Walker: "Chrissie Hynde" and "Father's Day"
7. Xavier Rudd & The United Nations: "While I'm Gone" and "Nanna"
8. Greensky Bluegrass: "The Four" and "Burn Them"
9. Guster: The Relix Session
10. Nicki Bluhm & The Gramblers: "Waiting on Love"
11. Houndmouth: The Relix Session
12. Nels Cline & Julian Lage: "Racy"
13. Hey Rosetta!: "Gold Teeth"
14. Holly Bowling: Phish Gamehendge Medley
15. The Lone Bellow: The Relix Session
16. The Doobie Brothers: "Black Water"
17. Watkins Family Hour: "Not in Nottingham"
18. G. Love: "New York City"
19. Nathaniel Rateliff: "Three Fingers In"
20. Shook Twins: "Growing Things" and "Same Boat"

Jambands.com Radio Chart

FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

1. Lettuce *Crush*
2. TAUK *HEADROOM*
3. G. Love & Special Sauce *Love Saves the Day*
4. Coral Creek *Coral Creek*
5. Turkuaz *Digitonium*
6. Greensky Bluegrass *All Access: Vol. 2*
7. Widespread Panic *Street Dogs*
8. King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard *Paper Mâché Dream Balloon*
9. Phish *Amsterdam*
10. Yonder Mountain String Band *Black Sheep*
11. Jackie Greene *Back to Birth*
12. Gill Landry *Gill Landry*
13. Grateful Dead *The Best of the Grateful Dead*
14. Circles Around the Sun *Interludes for the Dead*
15. The Marcus King Band *Soul Insight*
16. Jorma Kaukonen *Ain't in No Hurry*
17. New Riders of the Purple Sage *Where I Come From*
18. Cicada Rhythm *Cicada Rhythm*
19. David Bowie *Blackstar*
20. Dweezil Zappa *Via Zammata*
21. Jeff Crosby & The Refugees *Waking Days*
22. David Gans *It's a Hand-Me-Down*
23. The New Mastersounds *Made For Pleasure*
24. Stick Figure *Set in Stone*
25. Protoje *Ancient Future*
26. Grateful Dead *Fare Thee Well*
27. Henry Butler & Steven Bernstein *Viper's Drag*
28. Hot Tuna *Steady as She Goes*
29. Ronnie Penque *Only Road Home*
30. Trey Anastasio *Paper Wheels*

powderfinger promotions

Generated by Powderfinger Promotions, the Jambands.com Radio Charts are compiled from airplay by college, community, AAA radio and satellite stations across the U.S. that feature this music in specialty shows and regular rotation.

player." Whether it's his signature Rickenbacker in the midst of the guitar-heavy "Temptation" or a few plucks of his mandolin on "Phenomenon," Buck's contributions to *More Rain* are, as with all the other guests, understated yet vital. "He knows how to make simple sound really good," Ward says. "Those are my favorite guitar players."

Ward has never shied away from working with a diverse mix of artists and, in fact, some of his most high-profile records have been true collaborations. After establishing himself with five solo studio records in the early aughts, Ward teamed up with actress Zooey Deschanel to form She & Him, releasing their debut album in 2008. The following year, Monsters of Folk, an indie supergroup made up of Ward, My Morning Jacket's Jim James and Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis, dropped their first and only record to date.

When asked how a musical friendship turns into a full-fledged collaboration, Ward speaks to the organic nature of the experience. "It normally starts off as a mutual love for the same things," he says. "It starts out with baby steps of specific songs, one song at a time. Then, when you have a couple of songs, you immediately start thinking, 'Hey, we can make a record.'" Of course, it helps to have the right people around. "I consider myself very lucky to have found quite a lot of people—engineers and artists—that I truly love working with." He describes a good collaboration as being like a good dialogue, "where there's a back and forth that's almost equal," with each party listening to and trusting in one another.

Ward's collaborations aren't limited to performing. Over the span of his career, he has handled production duties for—along with his own projects—artists like Jenny Lewis, Carlos Forster and, most recently, Mavis Staples. (Her Ward-produced album *Livin' on a High Note* was released in February.)

"She's an amazing singer," Ward says of Staples. "I love working with her band, and we ended up getting songs from a couple dozen different songwriters for this project." That all-star cast of writers includes, among others, Bon Iver's Justin Vernon, Nick Cave, Ben Harper and Aloe Blacc, along with Case and Ward himself. "It was really unique," he says. "I'm excited for people to hear that record."

As his list of musical friends expands, Ward plans to remain busy on both sides of the recording console, especially on his own projects, whose production he has no immediate plans to hand over to another person. "Part of the joy of making records is producing," he says. "I'm not against it—someday, maybe—but there's just no need to delegate something that you love to do."

Monsters of Folk: M. Ward, third from left, relaxes with his pals Conor Oberst, Mike Mogis and Jim James in 2009.

He does admit, however, that it can be difficult to gain a wider view on his own work and look at it from a producer's standpoint. "It's not better or worse, it's just different," he says. "It's much harder because I've been working on the composition for, sometimes, years. I'm inside of the perspective, and I'm not really outside of it until some time goes by and I start studying them with friends and journalists, and then I learn things about them."

When listening to Ward's soothing intonations as he talks about how his career has come together, it's easy to forget how much work he has put into his and others' music over the years. His explanations almost make it seem like it all came easily—that he was just sitting inside one rainy day and the guitarist from R.E.M. happened to saunter up and offer to play on his album. But, in reality, it's more that his go-with-the-flow, do-what-you-love mentality has gotten him this far.

"The only way I know how to work is song by song, which means just diving in headfirst," Ward says. "It's really just following your nose to the next step." Luckily for him, his sense of smell is top-notch.

More Rain begins with a rainstorm and ends with sunshine, at least in musical form. Closing track "I'm Going Higher" is a ray of light, a forward-looking shout of exultation in the midst of the gathering storm, with a buoyant choir of voices (including help from The Secret Sisters) and a defiant refrain: "I'm going higher some day/ Although it might not look that way."

In a place where rainy days are the norm, he thrives by accepting the inevitable and always looking for the next project that he will immerse himself in with an open mind. "With every song, I try to say something different because I will get bored quickly if I'm just retracing my steps," Ward says. "The most important thing is to keep pushing the ball forward."

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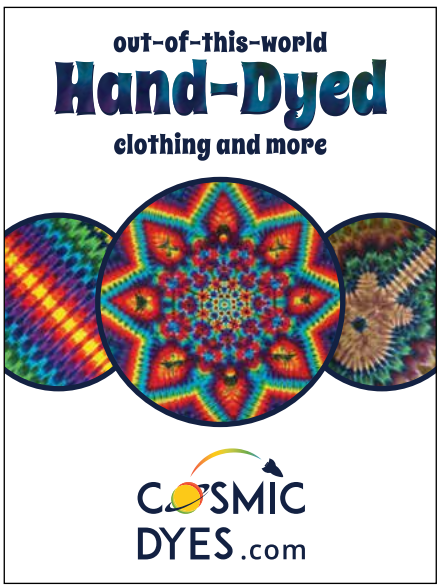

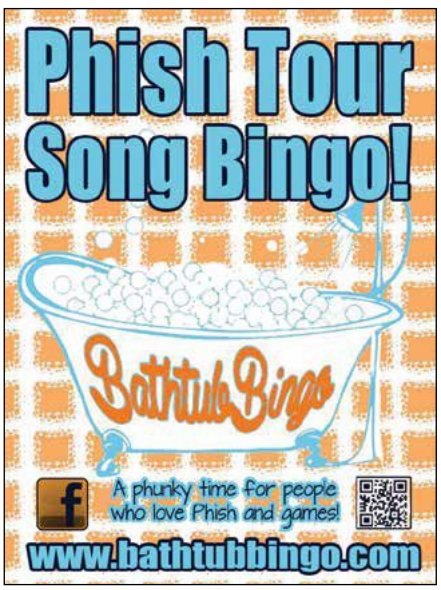

power," Epstein says. "By the time the next regime was in place, there was no path to promoting the albums."

Thankfully, that's not happening this time, but whether the Uber driver is a prophet and "Gone" is a smash is still TBD. The band's work ethic, though, certainly makes it seem like it could be. *JR JR* isn't a one-single-and-done album; the whole thing's full of songs that feel like future hits. "In the Middle" bumps with early MGMT-style drum loops and gurgling bass; "James Dean"—a song that began as a soundcheck throwaway before being fully developed—meanders through an Auto-Tune groove with touches of guitar swells and background percussion that manage to find the undiscovered middle ground between The Weeknd and Wilco.

And it's even more impressive considering much of the album was written with JR JR's members spread across the country—the recently divorced Epstein now lives in LA, while Zott's home is in Detroit with his wife, which means that they sent tapes and demos back and forth, with both of the guys contributing more and more small parts to the densely packed whole. (For what it's worth, they may end up back in each other's presence full-time, sooner rather than later: Zott frequently visits LA amid pressure to move, and Epstein's been looking seriously at buying inexpensive studio space in Detroit.)

Despite their sometimes disparate writing styles, the band is a collaborative and cohesive live force, as Zott and Epstein are both high-energy, multi-instrumentalists, flailing regularly around and in front of the stage—with backup musicians who also take care of everything from loop-triggering to bass-pounding. Their yin-and-yang look is complementary, and their instrumental prowess flows together.

One of the biggest challenges of being in JR JR is figuring out how to adapt their steady studio sound to the live arena; often, the band's goal is to figure out how to swap between instruments mid-song to nail all the parts. Sometimes, this works better than at others: At a recent LA show, Epstein was left clutching his Telecaster to his chest as the strap dangled at his side, lost in the keys-to-guitar swap.

"When we're putting it together to try to make it work live, we try to figure out what the most essential elements of the songs are—maybe there's a hook that's being played and someone absolutely has to play it, or a keyboard part [that stands out]," Epstein says. "We try to do as much of the song as we can and make sure that the moments of the songs that are supposed to pop out do, so the audience can focus on them."

It's all part of the band's bigger team-work strategy. "We trust each other and think each other are really talented," Zott explains over sushi, regarding the general process between the duo. "If I get something from Josh, and he's like, 'Do whatever you want on it,' it's like a free-for-all. I love it. If I know it's a good idea, a good raw idea, it's easy for me to play on top of it and mess around. And vice-versa: If I have a song fleshed out, the fun part is coming in after that [and hearing how Josh expands on it]."

There's also a real work ethic that the duo explores: It's not waiting around for a muse to come down from on high, but more like checking into a songwriting factory. "There are moments of inspiration that hit, and a lot of times that's where good ideas come from," Epstein says during a hazy songwriting-sesh break. "But you can't wait for them. Sometimes the good ideas come from the times where you're forcing yourself to work. I've kind of tried to develop a bunch of different exercises to avoid writer's block—like, program a bunch of chords into GarageBand and try to make a song from it. It's like a puzzle."

It seems sort of clinical in a way, but don't think that Epstein is anything less than fully immersed. In addition to his work with JR JR, he's become something of a songwriter-for-hire since he moved to LA, working with members of arena-size rock bands and pop superstars on tracks that veer from absurd funk like Bruno Mars to dark, brooding pop a la Tove Lo.

"Sometimes, with music, if you give yourself very specific parameters, you get more creative," Epstein says. "If you were to put yourself in a tiny room, you could know every inch of that room. Whereas, if you were to put yourself in a mansion, you may not make it into a room on any given day. But if you're in a studio apartment, every inch of that space gets used—and that's like an idea. The smaller the idea, the more fully you can form it."

And Zott and Epstein, as frequent collaborators and co-frontmen, are sometimes responsible for making each other's small ideas big. "Someone may have a little idea, but they don't think it's much of anything," Zott says. "The other person ends up with a big idea for it. Sometimes, you record it, and you realize: 'This song is incredible.' It's funny how having two guys who are the lead guys is the key to not hitting a writer's block—because you have someone else to bounce these ideas off of."

Back in the Uber, the driver turns up the song, singing along to the chorus. And I'm thinking back to something Epstein said, after bemoaning the fate of the band's last two records: "This one," he said, pausing for emphasis, "feels a lot better."

in their collective worlds. "Adam wrote a bulk of those songs in, like, five days after lying in bed for a week," he admits. "Adam had this music that he wrote to get out of where he was mentally—it was not only therapeutic for him, but it also became a palpable, real project for the rest of us and was different in every way."

Ghost Owl, as well as other spinoff ideas, soon faded—or were at least pushed to the side as "life" naturally started taking priority over creative pursuits. "I didn't miss the grind," Suttle reiterates, as the PA downstairs at Brooklyn Bowl begins to blast Talking Heads' "This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)," a fan-favorite PGroove cover. "And I thought the grind was the major contributor to everyone being burned out. Regardless of what finally lit the flame at the end, the grind was getting to everybody."

"We were all scared and then we realized it had a full grip on our boy because even after it was discovered and addressed, that didn't mean it stopped," McDonald says of Butler's struggles with addiction and accessibility.

But slowly, the band members started connecting with Butler again—at first, on a social level. He appeared healthier and more in control, and they eventually decided to test the waters with a pair of local shows at the Georgia Theatre last spring. The emotional performances were successful and encouraged PGroove to add a limited number of dates.

McDonald in perpetual motion

Perry, who has gained a newfound sense of maturity due to his relatively new role as a father, has a genuine tingle in his voice. "We are to the point now where, when you get onstage, we are not kids anymore," he says. "We have a real, *real* appreciation for what *needs* to happen to make it good for people that are there to see the show. I think that was lost. We didn't have that approach for years, and there were nights that you could tell. Now, we know what we have to do to be as good as we can. That's the most important thing to us: We know what we can do, but we all have to show up clear-eyed, focused and with a 'We'll kick your ass!' attitude."

As the four friends toss out words like "fine" and "maturity," their conversation takes on the feeling of group therapy. The members of their crew and entourage—much smaller these days, which isn't an accident—lingering in the venue's green room are eerily silent in the background, knowing many of these topics are still somewhat taboo, another sign that the band is finally comfortable discussing their collective weight.

Suttle, who's normally reserved and stoic, spouts: "I had forgotten—because we hadn't been playing as much after we stopped—just how physically therapeutic it was. I'm sure we all ran the gamut of emotions like: 'Career's over' and 'I'm done' and 'I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do now' and everything. Being a drummer, all of that catharsis can instantly be released once you sit down and start banging the shit out of stuff. The thing I missed the most was [feeling that], regardless of what's happening, how it's happening or what's going on day-to-day, as soon as I sat down and started playing, I was like, 'I'm gonna be fine.'"

> "We are to the point now where, when you get onstage, we are not kids anymore. We have a real, *real* appreciation for what *needs* to happen to make it good for people that are there to see the show."
> **ADAM PERRY**

McDonald emphatically adds: "We are getting a second chance, too." Suttle adds a more brutally honest assessment: "It's a moderate redemption." It's an ironic statement for a band that, for better-or-worse, has never been one to show moderation on any front—from those surround-sound tours, to retina-blinding light shows, to the non-existent veil separating them from their fans.

Butler offers his soft-spoken and exceptionally simple thoughts about the future of Perpetual Groove's music and collective direction: "My life is better with Perpetual Groove in it, but my life does not completely depend on it. I think that's where we all were. It's better with it, but it can go on without it."

He continues on, and with a wry grin, makes a point of picking his own pull quote: "I'd like for us to be in the heartstring demolition and renovation business... I'd like to rip 'em out and give them back to them later—like putting new strings on the guitar."

Onstage at the Bowl later that night, the band morphs from a blistering, cannon-exploding finale of "Teakwood Betz" into "And Everything"—the climax of both *All This Everything* and the evening's show—offering a nice bookend to the performance.

"I think that by acknowledging all of this other bullshit amongst us, we all respect each other more now than ever," McDonald says. "This band is something that the four of us can only really do together."

ALOC Media

Bonnie Raitt

BY DEAN BUDNICK

BONNIE RAITT HAS just released her 20th album, the spirited, engaging *Dig in Deep*. Her follow-up to 2012's Grammy-winning *Slipstream*, *Dig in Deep* captures the vibrant, joyous energy of Raitt's touring band and directly reflects her outlook through five original songs, which is the most she has written for an album since 1998's *Fundamental*. Raitt issued *Dig in Deep* on her independent Redwing label and has long maintained an active role in the business side of her career.

You contributed five songs to *Dig in Deep*. Can you talk about how your songwriting has evolved over the years?

I'm not naturally a songwriter. I come up with songs intermittently if I am inspired, usually for a kind of music that I'm missing in my show because I'm basically a touring artist, not a recording artist. Over the years, I have either been so moved by being loved—or by being hurt by love or some kind of inspiration—that I will sit at the piano. I tend to write more of the deep, personal songs on the piano, and the guitar ones tend to be a little more on the bluesy or reggae side, or a jam kind of thing.

I hadn't written in a long time before this last set of five songs I contributed to *Dig in Deep*, primarily because I was dealing with illness and the loss of both of my parents, and the eight-year brain cancer fight of my brother, who eventually succumbed in 2009. I was just so depleted. I really needed to take a break and not think about my next record or supporting my band and crew, or what I was going to do next. So I took a much-needed sabbatical in 2010. I still went to see music, but never to check out what the bass strings sounded like from a particular amp. I didn't think about whether I would cover a song or not. It was really refreshing.

Then, after the two-year *Slipstream* tour, I was really excited about a couple of grooves that were missing in my set. The song that's probably most important to me is "The Ones We Couldn't Be." It's about someone in my family I had a rough time with, who is now gone. While I was writing it, I also knew it had something to do with some previous relationships as well. I looked back and realized that it takes two people to make a relationship work, and it's often two people that make it fall apart. Ultimately, once you see the ways that you hurt each other or couldn't be there for each other, it just becomes very sad, no matter how hard you tried. You just couldn't be the ones that you each wanted the other to be.

Your version of "I Need You Tonight" on *Dig in Deep* is quite striking. How do you balance honoring a song and making it your own?

Sometimes, I'll be playing something at a soundcheck or in the studio, and the chord changes will remind me of another song, or I will start singing another song and I will put my own spin on it. Other times, I will just do an out-and-out cover like "Burning Down the House" and, of course, it's going to sound different than Talking Heads because I play slide guitar and I'm a woman and singing in a different key. Intrinsically, it's going to sound different when I cover a song done by a male band, but because I am a blues-rock-influenced person, that is the window that I'm looking through.

I have thought about doing that INXS song ever since I first heard it. I knew it would be such a great tune to play slide on when there is that stop and it says, "You're one of my kind..." I heard that whole arrangement that you hear on this record, and my guitar player, George Marinelli, came up with the killer slashing licks in the beginning.

Early in your career, you made a number of wonderful radio appearances. Have you ever considered putting some of those performances out on your label?

There are so many bootlegs already out there. Every live radio show I've ever done has been a bootleg for 15–20 years now. Back when I heard John Prine was doing a radio show, I would record it on my cassette player so I would be able to enjoy it later. In the old days, people just passed around cassettes, but nowadays, people try to monetize that stuff. So some Italian company or Wolfgang's Vault takes a live thing and tries to make money, but they don't pay the musicians or the songwriters, which is stealing. But in the old days, sharing mix tapes was a great thing.

You pay particular attention to your fans' ticketing experience to ensure that the best seats fall directly into their hands, with portions of the proceeds often benefitting local non-profit groups. How important should that be to an artist?

I don't ever tell other people what I think they should do, but I have been a business woman since I was a kid. Early on, I heard about the mistreatment of some artists, usually people of color, who originated the rock-and-roll songs, who got paid with a Cadillac and a bottle of whiskey, 100 bucks and some tour clothes. Meanwhile, the record company guys had country-club memberships.

I wasn't looking to have a career in the music business but, when I got offered a record deal when I was 21, I said, "I don't want to make hit singles—I don't care about being a star—but if you give me complete control of the budget and the money and what I record and when I can put it out and what I look like, then I will work really, really hard."

I've also been involved in the management of my lighting deals, bus deals, and ticket sales because I can't imagine relegating it to somebody else. I want to know where every dollar the fans have to spend is going, and I don't like the idea of the surcharges or the parking being too much.

There is a documentary in the works about Mississippi Fred McDowell. Can you talk about his music and its legacy?

Mississippi Fred McDowell and I had a wonderful relationship. I got to open for him at the Gaslight and a few other college gigs that we did and, sadly, he developed stomach cancer and passed away when I was 22, a few months before we were going to do a duet of a medley of his songs. It was the first time I really lost someone that I had become so attached to. I taught myself to play listening to his records, and then I got to see him and watch his fingering and the techniques that he used and some different chord positions. I became his avid student. We had the same sense of humor and he was just such a beautiful person. He was important to everyone from Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, Paul Butterfield and John Hammond to all of the people who went to the Newport Folk Festival or listened to those albums from the festival and rediscovered all of those wonderful Delta Blues artists.

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